

FOURTH EDITION.



\$2.50 a year.

Entered at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., at Second Class Mail Rates.

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June 23, 1885.

Vol. XVI.

Single
Number.

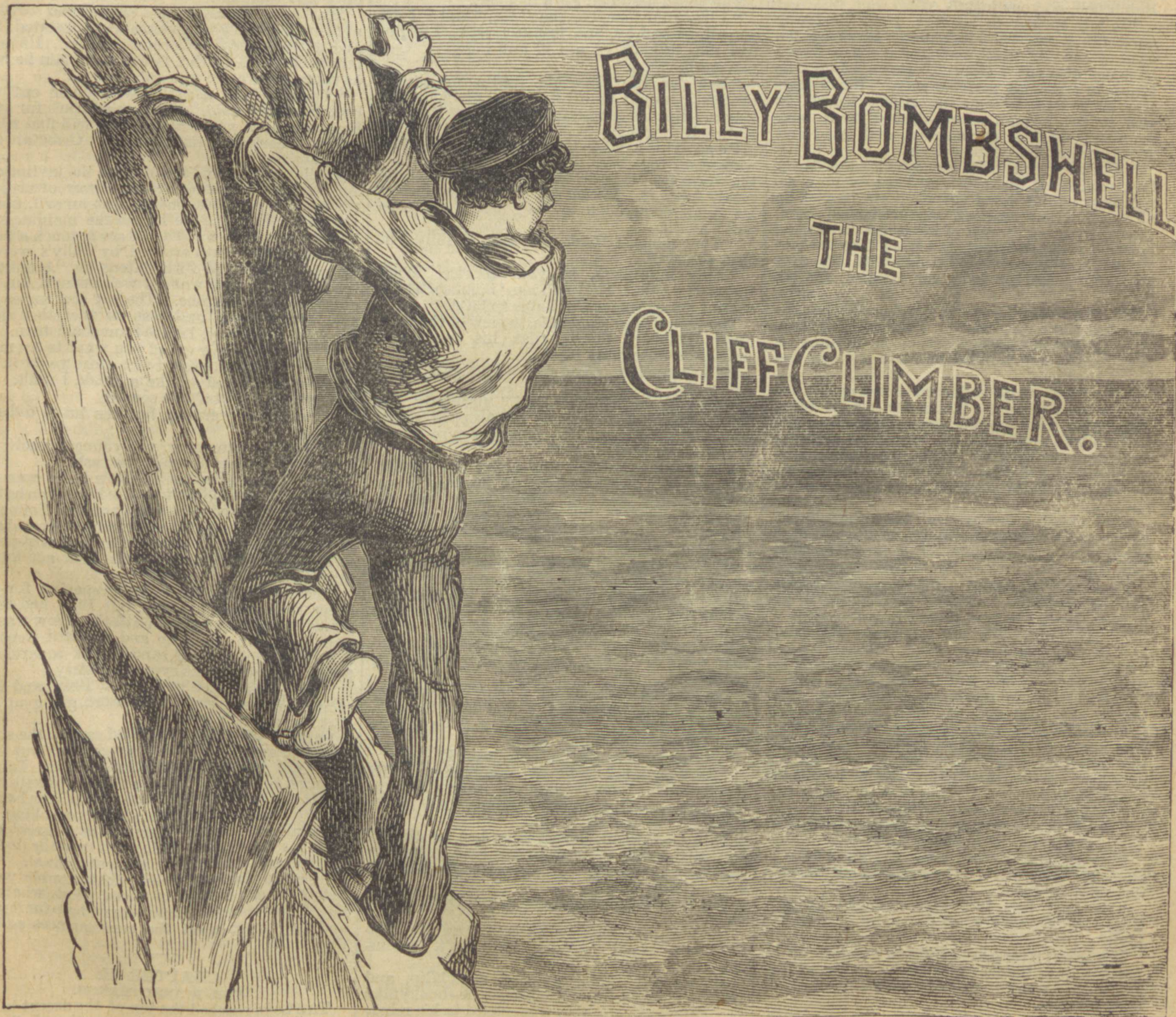
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 413.

Billy Bombshell, the Cliff Climber; or, A Hero in Spite of Fate.

BY FRANK S. WINTHROP.



"WORK, FOR YOU, BILLY BOMBSHELL!" EXCLAIMED THE HARDY BOY.

Billy Bombshell, THE CLIFF-CLIMBER;

OR,

A HERO IN SPITE OF FATE.

A Story of California.

BY FRANK S. WINTHROP.

CHAPTER I.

BILLY BOMBHELL HAS A BATTLE.

"By Joe! what's that?"

There was no one to answer the question, for the speaker stood alone on a bleak cliff of southern California. The rock was lapped by the waters of the Pacific, and it was while looking oceanward that the object met the speaker's gaze.

"Well, that gets me a few, jest a few! It's a wooden box; that much is sartin'; but ef I dis-kiver a man hangin' on't, it's a kind of fruit don't usually grow thusly. Wonder ef I'm the victim o' a optical confusion?"

The question was humorously put, but the speaker was queer in every way. A mere boy, yet with an old, sort of dried-up face which appeared to belong to a man past the prime of life; while his eyes and mouth were as sober and thoughtful as those of a college professor.

"Seemingly I see a man, an' he's a-floatin' on a box. He has a qu'ar taste, though it maybe a new-fangled bath-tub fur all I know. 'Pear-ances are s'prisingly deceptive. Still, I'm impressed by the idee that I behold a hooman bein' in strubble, an' I'll gush forth with vigor. Bumbshell, do your juty!"

The boy sprung to his feet, gave his lower garments a nautical hitch, and ran along the edge of the cliff until he found a place where he could attempt a descent. Down at once he began to work his perilous way. When mid-way he paused, to scan the object again. It was indeed a man afloat—lashed to a box, seemingly dead or unconscious, with head and shoulders just out of the water.

"Work for you, Billy Bombshell!" the hardy boy, exclaimed, and working his way with astonishing agility down the steep sea bastion he at length safely reached the surf-lapped shore. There, divesting himself of his jacket, he walked out on a projecting reef, and from it leaped into the sea, and at once struck out with the easy stroke of a fearless swimmer, heading for the box.

He swam steadily until, nearing the box, he saw that there was indeed a human being upon it, but the position and inaction of the man on it left grave doubts in Billy's mind if there was life in the form.

Nearer the young swimmer came until, raising his head from the water for a good view, Billy saw a man hanging well over the box, and a white face near his own. Stranger still, the unknown was hanging by the mechanical support given by his hands, bound at the wrists, which held him in place without any effort of his own.

Billy whistled, but grew all the more interested as he saw that the unknown was not so very much older than himself, being probably nineteen years of age.

The active lad swam up and examined him. He was insensible, but life yet remained in his body and could be kept there by good usage.

"Jess let me push him ashore an' I'll bring him around," muttered Billy. "I ain't goin' ter hev no sech likely lookin' chap as he is go inter the locker—"not ef I knows it!"

The work before the boy was not hard. The box moved obedient to his touch, and he headed it for the shore and swam on leisurely until land was reached. Once there he proceeded to get the senseless young man away, and as his muscles were surprisingly good he had no trouble in doing so.

"In a short time the work was done.

"Hands tied tight as a hanger's knot, by Joe! Wonder who did it? an' what for?"

Billy at once severed the cords, and began to chafe his companion, as he had seen old persons do in similar cases.

"By Joe! he's harnsome, though; he sartin'ly is. Wonder what devourin' cyclone hit him?"

It was not strange for Billy to wonder, for he was full of it, but he worked as he wondered, and in due time was rewarded by seeing his patient open his eyes.

"Take it easy," kindly advised the preserver. "Don't gush with vigor right away. Git yer

breath, as 'twere, afore ye let any off. Seemingly, that's the best way."

But the older boy arose abruptly to his elbow.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Them as should know say I'm Bombshell Billy or Billy Bombshell, or Billy the Cliff-Climber—jist as ye please; ye pays no money but takes yer choice."

"What are you doing with me?"

"Seemingly, I ain't doin' nothin'. How does it strike you?"

The youth looked puzzled and his gaze wandered. It fell on the box, however, and he started.

"I remember!" he exclaimed.

"'Twas in November," rhymed Billy serenely.

"Did you take me from the water?" continued the unknown, eagerly.

"Yas, that's about the size of it."

"I knew I should lose consciousness and tied my hands together around the box, but I didn't have much hope of hanging on."

"You hung on like a barnacle," said Billy, grimacing.

"Where are we, anyway?"

"Sence you've settled down ter business, I'll do ther same. We're two mild below Setback City. This here beamin' town you may, or may not, know is on the coast of Californy, U. S. A."

"I know," said the youth, frowning. "We were off the coast of California when they threw me overboard."

"Eh? Hullo! Threw you overboard, did ye say?"

"Yes."

"That was sarcy. Who did it?"

The youth hesitated for a moment.

"I like your face," he then said, "and I'll tell you all, by and by, but, just at present, I do not feel like talking. I am ill and hungry. Can you get me food?"

"Bet yer life. I could feed a multitude, though it would be all fishes an' precious few loaves. But never mind; foller me an' I'll gush forth with vigor."

He gave his hand to the rescued man and they walked on together. The latter was somewhat the worse for his bath, but no evil was likely to result from it. He surveyed the sharp face of his small companion as they went, and then spoke again.

"Your name, I think you said, is Billy?" he then observed.

"Billy Bombshell, at your service. Don't forget my title. They call me 'Bombshell' because I am so tender I'm liable to bu'st."

The idea was so laughable, in view of the boy's tough, compact figure, that his companion smiled, but he simply replied:

"I'll remember. And now, my name is Philip Alderson."

"I'll call you Petrel Phil," promptly announced the boy, "because you dropped 'round in such a qu'ar way. Seemingly, you're a sort of salt-water bird, anyhow."

The speaker led the way along the coast at as fast a pace as Philip cared to imitate. They went along a low cliff where there was an abrupt descent to the narrow beach in most places. At high tide the great Pacific lapped the ragged rocks.

At the end of ten minutes a considerable area of extremely rocky land arose before them, and Billy suggested that they descend the cliff and utilize the beach. There seemed to be but one objection to this, which was the difficulty of descending; but the boy easily found a path, and they went down and resumed their way along the sand.

Thus it was that, turning a point of rock, they saw a boat on the beach. It was near the cliff, and the receding tide had left a wide strip of sand between it and the water.

"It has been washed ashore," said Philip.

"Reckon not," said his companion. "Ef you'll observe them oars tucked inter a hole in ther cliff, you'll see you're wrong. An' hyer's footprints in ther sand, too."

Philip saw them himself then, but he did not feel any great interest in the boat, little suspecting what an important epoch in his life was about beginning.

But Billy Bombshell lingered and looked wishfully.

"It's a prime boat," he said, "an' ole Gabe Rockfoot would pay me well for't. Seemingly!"

He stepped inside, glanced at Philip, and seemed trying to decide whether he should take it. Before the question was settled in his mind, a gruff voice broke in on their solitude.

"Hullo, thar, you young thief! what in blazes be you a-doin' with that boat?"

Both Billy and Philip looked up hurriedly, the latter with some apprehension. Two burly, rough-looking men had rounded the point and advancing unheard in the sand, were almost beside them.

"Get out o' that boat, or I'll smash you ag'in' ther cliff!" added the second man.

"Seemingly, you won't do nothin' o' ther kind!" retorted Billy, as cool as an old soldier.

"You can't make out a case o' trespass hyer, fur your darned old boat is on ther swellin' sea, which is ther door-main o' Neptune an' common s'ile fur all!"

This judicial opinion was delivered with the gravity of a judge.

"Hullo, Hop-o'-my-Thumb, you're a sarcy chap, I see. I don't allow that; you must be took down. But, first—Tom, d'ye miss any-thing out o' ther boat?"

He winked at his companion who made a pretense of searching.

"Yas, ther compass is gone," he said.

"Ther young reptyle hes took it. Come hyer, you blamed thief, an' shake yer pockets. My name is Sam Tanner, an' I'll tan you ef you don't produce that compass."

"I hain't got your ole compass, an' I don't b'lieve you ever had one," said Billy, defiantly. "This here is a put-up job ter insult a free-born American citizen."

"I assure you, gentlemen," said Philip, "that we have not touched an article in the boat. My friend merely stepped in—"

"Now, you dry up, or I'll tan you. Speak when you're spoken to; boys should be see'd, not heard. I'm addressin' my remarks to this small snake, an' I say now I'll tan him ef he don't produce ther compass!"

Mr. Tanner rolled up his sleeves and scowled at Billy, but that young man at once imitated him and struck a most ludicrous position. He was laughable in all he did, but it was plain he was as courageous as he was quick-witted.

"Come an' see us; gush with vigor on!" he encouragingly said. "I'm a-waitin' fur ye, Samivel, an' if ye tackle me you will find what a free American citizen kin do. Come an' see us, Samivel!"

The big ruffian did not decline the invitation. As Bill had surmised, he had never owned, or possessed, a compass, but he was an evil, quarrelsome fellow, and he lacked the manliness to know it would be a cowardly act to touch a boy.

With all his wrath aroused by Billy's words, he made a forward rush, intent on "tanning" the boy. The rush was all well enough, but he did not catch his game. The boy shot under his arm like a flash, and was on the other side, laughing derisively, before Sam could turn.

"Gush with vigor on, ef you want to see me," he said, "but just think twice afore ye do it. I ain't ter be chewed up like a steak, I ain't. Ef you come ag'in, you'll be sorry."

It was a fair warning, but the brute did not heed it.

"I'll wring your neck, you young hound!" he roared, and again he made the rush.

By this time Bombshell Billy's blood was up. He knew it was unfair to abuse him when he had done no harm, and as he could not meet Tanner in equal fight, he meant to meet him as he could and do all the damage he could. He had whispered to Philip and was ready for the next act in the drama.

Forward dashed the bully, preparing for another rush under his arm, but Billy had other plans. Coolly he waited until the fellow was almost upon him; then up and forward went his arm, and a handful of sand struck squarely in Sam's face, filling his eyes completely.

"Gush with vigor on!" yelled Billy, and in a moment more he and Philip were going up the cliff like chamois hunters.

Philip, weary as he was, had caught the spirit of the moment, and made good time, but they were not immediately pursued. Sam Tanner stood on the beach working at his eyes with both hands and howling his wrath, while Tom had sat down on the boat and was placidly smoking.

Plainly, he did not sympathize a great deal with his friend, but Philip felt sure the baffled bully would not accept his defeat as final.

He could not help feeling that trouble would follow for one or both of them. But, whatever might be the result, there was no help for it now, and they must meet the consequences as best they could.

CHAPTER II.

THE RUINED RANCH.

The boys reached the top of the ascent in due time and Philip would have continued the re-

treat, but his young friend coolly stopped and looked down at the bully.

"Oh! Julius C. Caesar, see him claw inter his optics! Wonder how he likes gushing with vigor on? When he gets that sand out he will nev a rainbow in his eyes."

"We had better get out of sight before then," replied Philip.

"No; let's stop an' see ther fun. Them varmints ain't in any degree dangerous. They're so bulky they can't ketch us in a go-as-you-please, anyway. We'll stay hyer. Ha! ha! see him claw!"

It was indeed comical to see Tanner operate, and as Billy Bombshell could not be moved Philip sat down and took it coolly. In course of time the fellow cleared his eyes, and then he stormed at his companion because he had not caught the boys.

"You tried that an' got took in; I didn't want nothin' o' that kind myself," Tom answered. "That little snipe is a t'arer on an iron axle."

"I'll wring his neck!" said Sam.

"Do so—some other time. We can't stop now. Recollect we have business elsewhere. Besides, our orders are not to be seen loitering around the ruined ranch. Somebody might suspect something was inside."

Sam Tanner quieted down, suddenly.

"We must get out o' this, sure enough," he said. "Git ther boat afloat. Some day, though, I'll come back and tan that young scoundrel."

"Gush with vigor on!" said Billy, in a whisper.

And then the men embarked and rowed away toward the south. The boys doubted if they would ever meet them again; they did not suspect what trouble the evil pair were yet destined to make for them.

"Now fur somethin' ter chaw," said Billy. "I give ye warnin' in advance that you'll find my 'spectable grandmarm a tough owl from the ground up. She'll snap at us like a turtle, but you mustn't mind that. I don't; oh! Julius C. Caesar, no!"

Philip expressed fear that he would cause some inconvenience, but Billy laughed at the idea and led him along the cliff.

At the end of ten minutes they came suddenly upon a cabin nestled on the side of the cliff like an eagle's nest. Billy led the way inside without hesitation. The cabin was unoccupied.

"My 'spectable grandmarm is out," said Billy, "all o' which transpires lucky. I'll set out ther cut feed an' you kin gush with vigor on."

From a cupboard he produced bread, cold meat and a little wine, and Philip forgot everything but his hunger for awhile. He made a hearty meal before he finally pushed away the fragments. These, Billy promptly put back in the cupboard.

"Ef you feel like it, I move we go fur a walk. Ez nigh as I kin figure it, them two critters hev been ter ther ruined ranch, an' I want'er see what they hev did. It sticks in my crop that thar is something wrong about that place, an' I want ter see. We'll go—"

The boy stopped suddenly. They were near the door when some one entered and stood face to face with them. It was an old woman, bent, wrinkled and toothless, ragged and ugly, with a hump between her shoulders; but if signs went for anything, she had a good deal of strength, and Philip shrunk from her evil-looking eyes.

"You imp of sin! what are you doing?" she cried. "How dare you bring any one to this cabin?"

Philip was abashed, but Billy composedly cut a pigeon-wing.

"When ther cat's away, ther mice will play," he coolly quoted. "Spectable grandmarm, this hyer is Henry Clay Webster Jones, an' him an' me make a buzzin' team when wetie together."

The old woman made a stroke with her staff, which Billy dodged with ease, and poured out a stream of language which quite shocked Philip.

"Madam," he said, "I beg that you will overlook anything your grandson may have done—"

"An' I beg, 'spectable grandmarm, that you'll look over ther mountain an' see ther sun rise," added Billy.

The woman hurled her staff at the impudent boy, but he dodged it without trouble, and the coast being clear, hurried Philip out of the door. Followed by angry cries, they went up the cliff to higher land.

"I am very sorry for this," said Philip gravely. "Your grandmother is angry, and I have made trouble for you. I am afraid—"

"Now, hole right on," demurred Billy, more

earnestly than usual. "Let me explain. You don't know my grand-ancestor. She is the toughest critter along this coast. Her name is Hannah, but the neighbors call her the 'Witch of the Cliff.' They say she has killed sailors washed ashore in storms ter git their money. They say, too, she is in league with ther Evil One. Consequence, nobody will associate with her; she is a female outcast—so, ef I seem lackin' in respect, consider who she is."

Billy spoke with real feeling, showing himself possessed of a good heart, and Philip gained a better opinion of him.

"And she is really your grandmother?" he said, shivering.

"So she says," replied the Cliff-Climber. "At any rate, she brung me up. Let's change ther subject. Shall we go ter ther Ruined Ranch?"

"Yes; if you would like to."

Philip was already a good deal interested in his boy friend. He was bright and sharp, quick in every way, and he had shown that, though his tongue was, perhaps, too ready, his heart was generous and manly; so he followed him along the cliff, listening to his constant talk, for Billy had regained his usual spirits and joked and capered around in his old exuberant fashion.

They soon reached the Ruined Ranch. It was really but a few rods from Hannah's cabin, but Billy, fearing his grandmother would be watching, had made a *detour* to reach it.

Some years before a man from the East had started a ranch at this point, but he soon found there was no money in it. Matters went from bad to worse, the soil was too shallow and rock-bound to be fertile, he had illness in his family, and, one day, an earthquake shook down his house. This was enough for the settler, and he promptly packed his trunk and went home rather than remain and grow up with the country in this way.

From that time the house and other buildings had been deserted, and the place was familiarly known as the "Ruined Ranch."

Philip, looking on the remnants for the first time, saw a tumbled-down mass of *adobes* which was in some places shapeless, while in others arose walls distinctly marked to the height of twenty feet. His chief feeling in looking at it was that it was a curious old place, and for that reason he began to feel an interest in it.

"Let's go down," said Billy. "You'll see centipedes an' sech truck crawling over ther floor, but sech trifles ain't much. Reckon thar ain't no ghosts thar, fur I never see'd any."

"What can Sam Tanner and his friend have been here for?" Philip curiously asked.

"That is jest what I want ter know. I don't mind sayin' I hev see'd qu'ar things about ther ruins afore now. Ther place hes v'ices."

"What kind of vices?"

"Screeches by night, an' ther like."

"Oh! I see. What voices have you heard?"

"Ther first was a month ago. You see I am an open-air gentleman. I ain't slept in Hannah's house fur a year. Instead, I crawl inter some hole in ther cliff, an' sleep thar as sound as a baby in a cradle, with ther ocean ter sing my lullaby."

"I shouldn't like the music," said Philip, shivering.

"That's 'cause you hev been drowneded," Bombshell Billy logically replied. "Now, I like it, an' from my habit o' clambering 'round on ther rocks, people call me 'Ther Cliff-Climber.' But, ter resoon: One night I was in my hole in ther cliff when I was awoked by somethin' curious. It had seemed mightily like a woman's scream, but I took counsel o' reason an' decided it must 'a' been ther squalls o' a sea-bird. So I settled down fur another snooze. Wal, I was jest gittin' sleepy when I heerd a rumpus on ther beach. I looked down an' saw men on ther sand. They was talkin', but I couldn't hear nothin' they said. But they did not stay long. They went inter a boat an' rowed away. Arter that, I went asleep an' dreamed ther scene over ag'in, only that time thar was a pile o' screamin', an' I waded in an' rescued a daughter o' Queen Victoria from some buccaneers. But that was a dream, you see; sech things always is."

Billy paused to look aggrieved and then went on:

"Next day, bein' at ther ruins, I found big footprints thar which showed me some men had been in; very likely them as I see'd row away. I remembered the scream that woke me up, an' wondered if Sukey Brown or Molly Enright had been abducted. But they hadn't, an' I 'lowed my princess was a camera o' my brain."

"Have you seen anything since?"

"Some o' ther people round here who believe in ghosts, hev twice reported seein' sich at ther

ruins. Now, I don't believe in ghosts, but last night I *did* see somebody in ther ruins. I could almost hev sw'ared it was a female, but when I got thar, an' I run fast, thar was nobody thar. Now, these two galoots hev been ter ther place. Why? Wal, I allow thar is something wrong about these ruins."

The boy paused at the door of the house, which retained its original shape, and looked earnestly at Philip.

"Somethin' wrong," he repeated.

Philip Alderson had not expected to engage in any local undertakings when he landed on the California coast, but there was something in Billy's manner which invited him on. He already saw the case from Billy's point of view, and felt a keen desire to know if the old ruin really had a mystery.

He therefore said:

"Go on; we'll investigate together."

"Seemingly!" quoth Billy, and then they entered the place.

There was not much about it that was strange or of interest, so far as Philip could see. The walls and roof were down, as a general thing, and had taken just about the same position as is usual in such cases. Only one thing impressed Philip; the foundation of the house had been very firm, the owner evidently trying to found his house on a rock. At any rate, a good many heavy stones were visible at the rear, many of them being flat and of artistic form.

"Let's go down ter ther suller," said Billy.

He lit a pine knot he produced from a crevice, and they descended. Here, Philip was surprised at the size of the cellar. Built of a mixture of stone and *adobes*, it was divided into various compartments, which were in a good state of preservation.

"It is a scurrious ole hole," said Billy, swinging his torch around his head. "Some folks would rather sleep hyer than in ther side of ther cliff, but I like fresh air. Quite a suller, ain't it?"

They wandered from room to room until their further progress was barred by an iron door which seemed to be firmly fixed in the wall.

"What is this?" asked Philip. "Is here a room which is closed?"

"Ther evidence seems ter p'int that way. I should say by ther looks o' ther door that it was put thar ter stay, but 'twon't do no harm ter try it, an' see ef ther's any right o' way," and he advanced toward the door.

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Philip. "There is some one inside."

The boy paused and listened, and then to their ears was borne the faint, muffled sound of a child's voice, singing. As Philip listened to the sad song of the child, it seemed to recall a vision of his early childhood, when he had heard the refrain before.

Suddenly the singer paused, and as Philip advanced closer to the door he thought he could hear her sobbing.

"What does this mean?" he asked, turning to Billy, who stood holding the torch.

"My version is that thar's a girl inside thar who is a prisoner, an' she's been tryin' ter relieve her feelings a bit by singing."

"But why is she kept a prisoner here?"

"I give it up. P'raps ye'd better ask her that."

"I will."

Philip picked up a small stone and gave two or three sharp raps on the iron door. In a moment they heard the voice again, this time nearer and more distinct than before.

"Who is there?" it said. "If you are friends, I pray you help me."

"Who are you, and how came you here?" asked Philip.

"I am Sadie, and I am a captive here, kept by a bad woman. Ch! whoever you are, won't you help me to get away from this horrible place?"

"We will help you if we can. How long have you been here?"

"Nearly a month," she replied.

The thickness of the walls muffled the sound of their voices so much that it was not easy for our friends to converse with the young captive, and they soon took their leave, promising to do all in their power to release her ere long.

"She said as how she'd been hyer about a month," said Billy, as they returned to the outside. "I'll bet 'twas her as I heerd scream the night I heerd v'ices."

"It is very probable," replied Philip. "Have you any idea how we can release her?"

"Git a keg o' powder and blow up the ruins."

"Are you sure that would do?"

"The only trouble is, 'twould blow her up."

too. But I've got an idee. We'll go to Set-back ter-morrer an' git a lot o' keys, an' when we come back we'll tackle the door."

"I like that, and we will try it, though we may not be successful."

Night was approaching, and Billy suggested that they go to his "hole in the cliff," for he could see that his companion was in need of rest, and this retreat was the best he had to offer.

They were walking toward the place, talking of the ruins and the captive, when, as they suddenly turned a point of rock, they came face-to-face with a man who was going in an opposite direction.

The man started violently and then looked at Philip in a very peculiar manner.

"Bon soir, yer honor," said Billy.

The man gave the speaker a sharp glance, but said nothing. He then turned aside and walked rapidly away, but Billy's sharp eyes had noted a sinister expression on his face as he again looked at Philip.

"He ain't over an' above perlite. Mebbe I'll waste my breath speakin' ter him ther next time we meet. Did ye know him?"

"No; I never saw him before."

"Wal, he knows you, and it's my opinion he don't love ye any too well. Did ye see the way he looked at ye when he passed by?"

"Yes; I thought he did not look at me very amiably."

"Bet yer boots that man's yer enemy, an' will bear watchin'."

They continued their way, and soon came to Billy's quarters. They disposed themselves as comfortably as possible, and it was not long before Philip was fast asleep.

CHAPTER III.

"AWAKE, BILLY, AND FLY!"

PHILIP had been very weary, and he had scarcely lain himself down when he was fast locked in slumber. It was not so with his companion, for, though he lay quietly down so as not to disturb Philip, he did not immediately go to sleep. His mind was busy conning over the events of the day, particularly the strange manner in which he had made the acquaintance of the young man who lay by his side.

"By Joe! I wonder who he is, an' how he come ter be in ther water?" soliloquized Billy. "He said as how he'd tell me all about it. That feller we jest met seemed ter know him. I wonder who he is? I never see'd him afore. An' when we was up ter ther old lady's palace, my 'spectable grandmarm looked at him as though she see'd suthin' familiar. I wonder how Sam Tanner's eyes are gittin' along? He didn't tan Billy so much ez he thort he would. I wonder who ther gal in ther ruins is, an' how'd she come thar? I'll bet Petrel Phil an' I'll get her out. I wonder—"

Here Billy's wondering ceased, and he slept. Well might he wonder. The day had been an eventful one, but the near future was pregnant with events of a still more startling character. Philip had enemies in whose way he was a barrier, and in his death lay their only safety. More than once had attempts been made on his life, but up to this time he had almost miraculously escaped. On the last occasion Billy had been instrumental in saving his life, and in so doing had identified himself as a victim for the vengeance of Philip's enemies.

Billy, of course, knew nothing of this, but even if he had, the brave-hearted boy would not have hesitated.

Sleep on, Philip! Sleep on, Billy! Sleep while you may, for "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and all too soon will you wake to the troubles which fate has in store for you.

The place where the boys lay sleeping was nothing more than, as Billy had expressed it, a "hole in the cliff." It was surrounded on three sides by the solid walls of the cliff, while on the fourth side it was nearly closed in by an overhanging rock.

The boys had slept quietly for some time, when suddenly there was a patter of light feet on the outside, and a young girl made her appearance.

She knelt down near the aperture and peered within. All was dark inside and she could see nothing, but the heavy breathing of the sleeping boys assured her that the place was occupied.

"Billy! Billy!" she called. "Billy, awake! you are in danger here, and must wake and fly!"

The sound of her voice awakened Billy, who raised himself on his elbow and looked out.

"Hello!" he said. "What's wanted? Who's thar?"

"It is I, Molly Garrett. I have come to warn you. Even now an assassin is on his way here to kill your friend, and you, too, if you make any resistance. Make haste and fly before it is too late!"

"Who is it as is comin' ter wring in a cold deal on us?" asked Billy.

"My uncle, Ben Garrett. I heard them plotting in our cabin, and I hurried away to warn you. Do not stay here, but hurry away and hide yourselves somewhere. I dare not remain here any longer, or they will be here and discover me."

"Much obleeged ter ye, Molly. We'll soon git out o' this. Hullo! hyer, feller! we've got ter climb!" and Billy hastily awoke Philip and told him what had occurred.

They scrambled up and crept to the opening. Billy looked out, but suddenly drew back.

"We're an inch too late," he whispered. "There comes ther man who's ter give us our dose. Keep quiet, now, an' any time when yer git a chance jist slide out o' this quicker'n scat. Mebbe we might bamfoozle him when he crawls in hyer, but I guess 'discretion is ther best part o' ther value' in this case."

It was as Billy suspected, Ben Garrett that he had seen approaching, and he was now near the opening. He stooped down and looked inside, but could see nothing. He hesitated a moment and then prepared to enter.

The boys drew themselves as closely to the wall as possible, and quietly awaited the course of events. They had not long to wait, for Ben Garrett had already thrust himself half-way through the opening.

He crawled carefully forward, feeling cautiously for the bodies of his intended victims. In a moment he had passed by the two boys, and then Billy touched Philip, and stooping down, they darted from the place. He had hardly gained the outside when his companion made his escape in the same manner.

Ben Garrett heard them as they scrambled through the opening, and realized that he had been outwitted, but he hastily followed, hoping to catch them ere they could fly and accomplish his purpose. But when he gained the outer air they were nowhere visible.

He listened and heard their footsteps as they hurried away, and he started on a run in the direction from which the sound came. The boys knew they would be pursued, and that by putting forth strong efforts at first start they would save themselves a long race. They were much faster runners than their pursuers, and it was not long before they were so far away that he had not the sound of their footsteps to guide him.

He kept on, however, for some time longer, until, at length, persuaded that they had escaped him, he stopped to take breath and vent his wrath in a torrent of profanity.

"They've got away this time, fur sure," he said puffing, "but thar's another day comin', an' I'll have 'em yit. I s'pose I might ez well go home now."

The boys had stopped to listen, and not hearing the sound of pursuing footsteps had concluded that Garrett had given up the chase. They moderated their pace to a walk, and continued on their way.

"Where will we go now?" asked Philip.

"I've got another place, better nor that 'un was," replied Billy, "an' one that they won't find so easy, nuther. 'Tain't quite so handy ter git to, but when ye're thar ye're safe from all inroads o' ther enemy."

"Is it near here?"

"Yas, 'tain't fur away; jest 'round ther p'int."

They were now near the sea and were approaching a high mass of rocks, the base of which was washed by its waters. Billy led the way, walking in the water and keeping close to the rocks.

"Keep clus ter ther cliff," he cautioned. "We're walking on a shelf o' rock, an' ef ye should step off ye'd go down, an' she's powerful deep out there. Kin ye climb? Thar, here we be; now we've got ter climb up these rocks a bit till we come ter a opening ter a cave. When we're once inside we'll be all right. S'pose ye kin do ther trapeze business up them rocks?"

"If you will go up ahead and show me the way, I think I can make the ascent."

"Wal, then, hyer goes, but be car'ful. I'm used ter scaling cliffs, but sometimes it's pooty scaly business."

The place where they had to climb was not a cliff, but an irregular mass of sharp, jagged rocks of every shape and size, and rising at an angle of about sixty degrees to the hight of seventy or eighty feet.

It was no easy matter to climb this place in the daytime, when a person could see how to go, but the darkness made the task doubly difficult. But Bombshell Billy went up like a squirrel, and his companion fearlessly followed.

They soon reached the top, and entered what appeared to be the mouth of a cave.

"Now," said Billy, "we're in a fortress as impregnable as that o' Gibshalter. The Old Nick, hisself, couldn't climb up them rocks ez long ez ther dornicks held out ter pelt him with."

"Is this a cave, or is it an opening in the cliff like the other place?"

"This is ther ginnywine article, all wool an' a yard wide, warranted not to fade. I don't know how fur she sets back, 'cause I hain't never had time ter fully s'plore et, but ez fur ez I hev gone et's all cave, an' always opens up her cavernous depths still beyond."

"Is there no way of reaching it only by climbing those rocks?"

"None as I knows of, unless ye come down from ther top of ther cliff, which is a perpendicular declension of thirty or forty feet. Ef anybody should try ter come that way they'd be likely ter light out here all in a heap. But I say, pard, hedn't we better lay down an' court old Morkeous! I don't like ter be broke o' my rest this way."

"I think we had," said Philip. "I begin to feel the need of rest."

Without saying more they both lay down upon the rocky floor, and were soon locked in slumbers, from which they did not arise for several hours.

When they awoke the next morning the sun was high in the heavens.

"This hyer is a pooty time ter be gettin' up, ain't it," said Billy, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes. "We orter be on ther way ter Set-back by this time, instead o' snoozin' hyer."

"And so we will be presently," replied Philip. "How far away is it?"

"'Bout two mild, ef we don't meet nobody on ther way ter hinder us."

"Whom do you expect will hinder us?"

"Wal, I s'pect Ben Garrett will get in his worke ez soon ez he gits a chance. An' 'twon't do no hurt ter keep yer optics well peeled fur that perlite feller we met last night, when we was returning from ther ruins. He don't love ye fur a cent."

"We will try and keep on our guard against both Ben Garrett and the other man."

They descended by the way they had come the night before, and soon stood on the beach near the place. No one standing there, nor indeed at any point along the beach, would suspect that there was a cave at the top of that mass of rocks.

They did not stop to look long, but set out immediately for Setback City. It was nearly noon when they arrived at that place.

They got their dinner and made such purchases as they needed, and started to return. In the meanwhile Bombshell's sharp eyes had not been idle. There were two persons who had been furtively watching them almost from the very moment of their arrival in the town.

One of these was the man they had encountered on their way from the ruins to their lodgings in the cliff the night before. His face to-day wore the same malignant expression, whenever his eyes rested upon Philip, that Billy had noticed when he passed them the night before.

He called Philip's attention to him, and said:

"That feller knows you, if you don't know him, and he don't dote on ye no great, nuther."

"The events of the last few days, as well as those of the past, prove conclusively that I have enemies, and it may be that this man is one of them."

"Then thar's another feller seems ter hev considerable interest in our movements, but he don't look quite so ugly as t'other one."

They did not stop to bestow much attention on either of these men, for they had other business to attend to. They were soon en route for the ruins.

For a while there was little conversation, each being busy with his own thoughts; but at length Philip broke the silence.

"I told you yesterday," he said, "that I would some time tell you my history, and now, if you feel like listening, I will relate to you all that I know of my past career."

"Fire ahead! Ther jury are swore in on a panel, an' are waitin' impatiently fur ther facts."

"My name, as I told you yesterday, is Philip Alderson. My earliest recollections are of a grand house near some large city, where I lived with my father and mother. Where this was I have no idea, though I think it must have been

somewhere in the East, for at a very early age I was stolen away from my home; and my next recollections are of being in New York City, in the care of a horrible old man. My life here was very different from what it had been previously. I was subjected to cuffs, kicks, and all kinds of abuse, and my cruel master forced me to go out, dressed in rags, to beg on the streets."

"He must 'a' been a near relative o' my 'spectable grandmarm."

"When about eight years old I ran away, and after wandering about and begging my food as best I could, I ultimately found myself in one of the small towns on the coast of New Jersey."

"Right 'nuff! Yer did right ter puckachee. But go on—go on; yer tale doth big with interest grow."

"There I fell in with an old fisherman, who cared for me kindly, and gave me every advantage which his limited means would allow. It was while here that I acquired what little education I possess. I remained with this man until I was thirteen years old, when I was kidnapped and put on board a vessel which immediately sailed on a whaling voyage. I accepted my fate, as I could not well do otherwise, and never saw my native land again for nearly six years."

"A short time ago I took passage on a sailing vessel from China, bound for San Francisco. While off this coast I was thrown overboard by men to me unknown. Fate brought me in contact with the box to which you found me clinging."

"Ther evidence now bein' in, ther joory will hear ther argument *pro an' con*."

"I think," continued Philip, unheeding the interruption, "that I have some enemy who stole me from my parents when I was four years old, again when I was thirteen; they made their third, and what they evidently intended for their final attack, when I was thrown overboard. And there is no doubt but it would have been my finale, had you not seen me and brought me ashore."

"Did ye notice any 'spicious characters on board the vessel ye took passage in?"

"They were none of them very prepossessing in appearance, but I did not notice that any looked particularly bloodthirsty."

"Wall it are ther opinion o' ther joory that this are a case of shiduglery in ther second degree. We are all agreed, an' we render a verdict o' guilty ag'in' some party or parties to us unknown. Ther jedge will reserve ther sentence till we ketch ther perpetrator, or ther ag'avator of these attacks. Ther court is also of ther 'pinion that that funny business o' Ben Garrett's last night may safely 'sidered ter be attack number four. 'Cordin' ther ther evidence o' Molly, he was recited thereto by ther promise o' a reward from a individual to us unknown, who might, or might not be ther depredator of the former 'tacks."

"I have no doubt that the affair of last night was only a continuation of my former persecutions."

"An' furthermore, it are the 'pinion o' this court that ther old lad we met, who scowled at ye so lovingly, is in some way connected with ther whole business. Hi! there ye be ag'in! No. 5!"

This exclamation was caused by the whiz of a bullet as it cut the air close to Philip's head, severing a lock of hair in its passage.

CHAPTER IV. IN THE SEA AGAIN.

"WHOEVER they are, my enemies are evidently very much in earnest," said Philip, as he raised his hand to the side of his head, where the lock of hair had been cut away. "But a miss is as good as a mile."

"An' better'n an ole maid," said Billy. "But they're comin' thicker'n faster. This hain't a very healthy locality, it 'pears ter me, an' I vote we git."

"To the ruined ranch?" asked Philip.

"Yas; ther leetle gal 'll think we ain't goin' ter keep our 'p'intment, ef we don't show up purty soon."

They increased their speed somewhat, and in a short time they made their way among the ruins to the door of the place where the captive was confined.

The keys which they had procured at Setback were produced and they proceeded with their task, but though there was a large assortment, there was not one among them that would fit the lock. Their journey to Setback City had been fruitless, and they were no nearer effecting the release of the little prisoner than they had been the day before.

The girl had heard them at their work of fitting the keys, and she came near the door hoping to see it open for deliverance. They assured her that, although their first plan had thus far failed, they would not give up, but would do all in their power to effect her escape.

They then retired from the ruins to try and conceive some plan.

"I reckon we shall hev ter fall back on the keg o' pow'er an' blow up ther whole business, or git a cannon an' ruin ther rest of it," said Billy.

"Whoever her keeper is, he must visit her to bring her food. She said her jailer was a horrible old woman, didn't she? Why could we not watch near the entrance, and, when she makes her appearance to bring her supper or breakfast, overpower her, secure the key with which the door is locked, and then release the prisoner."

"That ain't a bad idee. Prob'ly they don't wisit her only in the night. Guess we'd better pay a wisit to my 'spectable grandmarm, an' git suthin' ter refresh ther inner man. Hi! hol' on a minute. I've left my knife back thar. You jes' wait here till I go back an' git it. I laid it down when we was tinkering on that door. I won't be gone more'n a minute."

Billy did not wait for his companion to reply, but darted off to recover his knife. After they left the ruins they had walked away toward old Hannah's cabin, and were now out of sight of them, though not many rods away. Philip sat down upon a rock to await the boy's return.

Bombshell ran along the back-track to the place they had left but a moment before, and made his way toward the iron door where he expected to find his knife.

He found something he was not looking for.

As he was hurrying along toward the spot where he and Philip had tried the keys, he rushed into the arms of a man who, hearing his approach, had turned to see what was coming.

Billy had not time to turn or dodge, and was for once fairly captured, and in the hands of the man who now held him was powerless as a child. But his tongue was not paralyzed, even though his hands were helpless.

"Let me go, ye big kuss! What ye doin'?"

"Who are you, and what are you prowling around here for?" asked his captor.

"Who be you, an' what *you* prowlin' 'round here fur?"

"Ha! I see now who you are. I've seen you before, my fine lad. You are quite too free-and-easy in your ways, and altogether too numerous."

"Come ter think, I reckon I see'd *you* afore. 'Scuse me fur not recognizin' ye sooner. But of course ye'll look over any sich trifle ez that when a feller makes the *comende honorable*. Ef ye'll ease up yer grip on my collar, I'll be obliged ter ye."

"You will, will you? Well, we'll see about that. As I just said, you make too free with business that don't concern you; and I think I have a place in here that will just fit your case. Once there, you won't trouble me again at present."

So saying, he walked toward another part of the place, dragging Billy with him. He came presently to another iron door that Billy had not seen before, but which was similar in appearance to the one he and Philip had been at work upon.

Producing a key, the man unlocked the door, which then swung back of itself. He gave the Cliff-Climber a toss inside, and shut the door before he could pick himself up.

"I say, you crittur, let me cut o' this! Ye don't know who I be, do ye? I'm Billy Bombshell, I be, an' ef ye don't open that door an' let me out, I'll explode an' blow this blarsted old tenement ter blue blazes."

The man made no reply, but left the place and walked rapidly away. He was the same man the boys had met the night before, and whom Billy had seen scowling at them that day at Setback City.

For some reason he had entered this place only a moment after the boys had left it, and Billy had come rushing back just in time to be captured.

"By Great Jones!" said the boy, as he sat on the rocky floor and surveyed his surroundings. "This hyar are a nice fix fur Billy Bombshell, ther Cliff-Climber, ter be in. I guess ye've got a cliff hyer ther ye kain't climb. Holy smoke! but I'm mac! When I git out o' this I'll make it warm fur him. But how aire we goin' ter git out is ther question now before ther court. Billy Bombshell, I never 'spected ter see ye behind prison-bars. What'll yer 'spectable grandmarm say? She'll be disappointin', 'cause

she allers said ye's born ter be hung. Le's see how ther thing looks."

He arose and examined his prison more critically. He was surrounded by four strong walls of *adobe*, all resting on a floor of solid rock. In the floor above, which was of the same material as the walls, was some sort of an aperture through which the light dimly shone.

Opposite to the door through which he had come was another door in every way similar, except that there seemed to be no place for a lock. On examination Billy found this to be the case, but when he threw his weight against it, hoping it would open, he found it was as solid as the wall itself. It appeared to be set into the *adobe* in such a manner as to form a part of the wall.

He tried the door through which he had been thrust, but it was firmly locked. He glanced overhead at the aperture through which came the light, but it appeared to be covered by iron bars, and was so small that it was doubtful if he could squeeze even his small body through it were the bars not there; besides it was at least ten feet from the floor, and no way to reach it but to climb the smooth, perpendicular side of the cell.

"By gum! I'm in a trap this time fur sure. An' that ain't ther wu'st of it; I don't see how I'm goin' ter git out. Wonder what Petrel Phil will think? Most like he'll git gobbled, now I ain't 'round ter look out fer him. Wal, there hain't no use blubberin' over spilt milk."

With which bit of philosophy he sat down on the floor, with his back to the wall, and gave himself up to reflection.

In the mean time, what was Philip doing?

When Billy left him to go back to the ruins for his knife, he sat down on a rock to await his return, and was soon lost in thought.

Could it be that these recent attacks on his life had any connection with the persecutions which had attended him as a boy? Was this man he and Billy had noticed regarding him with such a vindictive look, the one who had caused him to be stolen from his home when a child, and again still later in his career?

With his mind fully occupied with these meditations he had taken no note of time, but at last he aroused himself and began to wonder why his companion was gone so long. At length he arose and walked back, thinking to meet Billy on the way, but when he had reached the ruins without seeing him, he began to feel some apprehension for his safety.

He entered the place and searched it thoroughly, but found no signs of his companion. He found his knife where he had laid it down, near the iron door, but Bombshell Billy was nowhere to be seen. The fact that he had not regained possession of his knife led Philip to believe that he had not entered the ruins at all, although he had returned with the avowed purpose of doing so.

"He may have turned after leaving me," he thought; "but why should he do so without first apprising me of his intention?"

Having assured himself that he was not among the ruins, Philip determined to seek him at the cabin of old Hannah, and he immediately bent his steps in that direction. On his arrival there he found the cabin untenanted; his knocks and calls remained unanswered.

At length he opened the door and passed inside, but no one was there, and there was nothing to show him that Billy had been there that day. He lingered only a moment, for he feared the wrath of dame Hannah should she return and find him there.

He went outside, and was about to start for the cave by the sea when he was startled by seeing the old Witch of the Cliff, as she was called, who suddenly appeared almost at his side.

Philip greeted her respectfully and asked:

"I am in quest of your grandson, Billy, who left me a short time ago, promising to return immediately. He did not do so, however, and I thought perhaps he might have come here. Have you seen him?"

"No, I hain't," she snarled, "nor do I wish to. 'Tis all a lie! What seek ye around old Hannah's cabin? Get ye gone, ere I curse ye!"

"I assure you, madam, I only come to seek Billy, who has mysteriously disappeared."

"Ay! all is mystery! all is mystery! What seek ye of the boy? Some trouble to him, I warrant. Get ye gone! get ye gone! And come no more to the old Witch's cabin, or dread her curse."

The old woman glared at him in anger, and her words, together with the way her eyes flashed, combined to make him decidedly uncomfortable.

He turned and walked rapidly away, following

by horrible threats of vengeance should he ever again approach her habitation. He felt sure he should never do so unless some urgent occasion demanded it; he dreaded to look upon her, for when her features were convulsed with anger she was a horrible sight to behold.

A much pleasanter sight, and one quite in contrast, met his eyes, when, turning a point of rock, he suddenly came face-to-face with Molly Garrett. For a moment he was as much confounded as when he had faced the old hag above, but from a very different cause.

His confusion, however, was not shared by the young lady, who recognized him as the young man she had seen the previous day with her young friend, Billy, and she at once addressed him.

"I am glad to see you heeded my warning last night, and that it came in time for you to profit by it."

"Are you the young lady who gave us such timely notice of approaching danger, last night?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "But where is Billy?"

"I do not know; I am looking for him now."

Then Philip told her how Billy Bombshell had so quickly and mysteriously disappeared. He told her all the circumstances as far as he knew them, omitting only the reason for their being in the vicinity of the ruined ranch.

"Did he not return to old Hannah's cabin, up on the cliff?" she asked.

"No, for I have been there in quest of him. There was no one inside when I arrived, but I met his grandmother as I came away, and she told me, although very ungraciously, that she had not seen him."

"He must have been detained somewhere by force, for Billy Bombshell is not one to desert a friend in this way."

"There is another place to which I have not as yet been," said Philip, "where he may have gone for some reason."

"Wherever you go, remember to keep well on your guard against my uncle, Ben Garrett," said the girl, as she glanced around apprehensively. "There is a price set on your head; he is a bad man and will not hesitate to earn it, even at the expense of your life."

"You told Billy last night that you overheard them plotting against our lives. Do you know who it was that hired Ben Garrett to do the deed?"

"No, I did not see him. But I heard their conversation plainly."

"Did you hear any reason given for his wishing me dead?"

"No, only that you were in his way, and dangerous to him, and that you must die."

"I should very much like to know who it is that is thus plotting my death, and in whose way I am."

"That I cannot tell you. I saw my uncle talking with a man, to-day, on the cliff, who I suspect may have been the one whom I heard with him last night at our cabin, but I have no proof that he is the same."

"I have reason to thank you for my life," said Philip, warmly, "for we undoubtedly owe it to your warning that we are alive to-day."

Night was now near at hand, and the girl went on her way. Philip stood for a moment where she had left him, watching her fair form as it disappeared in the shadows, and then turned and continued his way.

He went immediately to the cave where he had spent the previous night, but Billy Bombshell was not to be seen. He called him loudly by name, thinking perhaps he might have gone further back into the recesses of the cave, but there was no reply save the echoes of his own voice.

He deposited the keys and other packages which they had purchased that day, at Setback, upon a natural shelf on the rock, and prepared to descend again to the beach.

He was now quite alarmed for the safety of his young friend, and he started to return and search again among the ruins. Perhaps he had returned to the point where they had parted, and was waiting there for him. Perhaps he had—

"There he is, now! Seize him!"

Philip was suddenly startled from his conjectures by the above exclamation, and ere he could recover from his surprise he found himself helpless in the hands of two men, who, even in the darkness, he recognized as the same that had been discomfited by Billy Bombshell the day before.

"Bring him along, men!" said he who had spoken before. "He has as many lives as a cat, but I doubt if he gets away this time."

Philip understood by this that he was in the

power of the person who had instigated so many attempts on his life already. His hands had been bound, and he was forced back along the beach until they came to a boat. The three men stepped inside, and Philip was obliged to follow. Two of the party took their places at the oars and rowed silently out to sea.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Philip.

"You will learn soon enough," was the reply.

In a few minutes the men stopped rowing and the boat rocked silently on the water. One of them took a rope, to which a large stone was fastened, and tied it firmly around his body. It began to be apparent what they intended to do, but all his questions failed to elicit a word from their lips. He had ere now recognized the leader, the man who sat at the helm, but his knowledge had come too late to avail him aught. One appeal for mercy, he made, as the two men raised him up and prepared to swing him over the side of the boat, but there was no mercy in that cold hard voice:

"Swing him over!"

One silent prayer to God, one last look at the moon, which for a moment pierced the black clouds above him, one last thought of the home of his infancy which he would never see again, and the dark, merciless waves closed over him, rippled for a brief time, and then lay calm and still as though not hiding a crime so terrible.

The assassins looked at the spot a moment and then seated themselves at their oars and rowed rapidly away.

CHAPTER V.

LOST IN THE CAVE.

In the meanwhile how fared Billy Bombshell in his quarters at the ruins? He had sat down to try and devise some way to get out of his prison. For a long time he sat and thought, but the more he thought the more convinced he became that he was there to stay during the pleasure of his captor. A dozen times his eyes wandered over the blank walls of his prison, but each time with the same unsatisfactory result.

"Great Caesar!" he exclaimed. "This hyer is gittin' ter be monotonous, an' moreover, it's ther 'pinion o' this court that it ain't constitutional."

He arose and began pacing to and fro across the floor, still soliloquizing in an angry manner. He had several times tried the door through which he had come, but it still remained fast. At length he paused in his walk before the opposite one.

"I wonder ef this are a door? If 'tain't, what's et hyer fur? Wonder what's t'other side out? Open sesame! blarst ye!" and as he spoke he raised his arm and gave the door a thump with his hand.

The result surprised him.

He had accidentally touched a secret spring, and the door began to rise slowly in the grooves into which it was fitted. It rose till it was entirely out of sight, leaving an open place in the wall through which one might pass. Then it began slowly to return to place.

"Great Jones! she's comin' down ag'in. Bombshell Billy, on which side will you be found? Be ye goin' ter stay hyer like a captive calf? Not much, ye ain't. Give me liberty or give me ther colic! I'm goin' ter git out o' this. Hi! hyer ye go! Seemingly."

He was none too soon for, hardly had he darted through the opening and regained an upright position, when the door closed with a sharp click.

"Ther die is cast! Caesar, you've passed ther Rubicon. Kain't say ef I've bettered myself much," he muttered, as he looked around trying to pierce the darkness. "But variety is ther spice o' life. Wonder whar I be anyway? She's darker 'round here than a procession of our colored brethren. Wish I had a glim. Won't old Scowler be s'prised when he opens that thar door an' sez, 'Come forth, Euripides!' An' Euripides won't come forth fur a cent. Guess I'll take a promenade an' see what I kin diskiwer."

Billy dropped on his hands and knees, and began feeling about him. The floor beneath him was evidently of rock. He crawled cautiously along, feeling his way as he went, until a dozen feet away from where he started his further progress in that direction was barred by a rocky wall.

"Billy Bombshell, you're a fool! It's my 'pinion that ye've jumped from ther fryin'-pan inter a blarsted sight hotter place. Ye wanted ter see what was this side o' that door, an' now I reckon ye've seen all ye want ter."

He crawled along, keeping close to the wall, until he came to a place which seemed like a passage. He turned into it and, arising to his feet, went cautiously forward. After he had

walked for some distance in this manner, the passage suddenly terminated in what he at first thought was an underground room.

It was lighter here and, after he had looked about a moment, he came to the conclusion that he must be in a cellar, and seeing a flight of stairs leading upward he soon mounted them. At the top he found a trap-door which he had no difficulty in raising. He passed through and stood in a room which he at once recognized.

"By ther great E pluribus, pluribus! Ef this don't beat ther Dutch! Here I be right in my 'spectable grandmarm's cabin. Seemingly! Wonder ef my maternal grandparent is aware of ther fact o' ther 'bein' a connecting link atween her sullen an' ther ruins. Most likely she are, but she never apprised me on't. Guess ther old lady are out. Wonder what she's got in ther way of consumables layin' 'round? I begin ter feel a sort o' a vaccum in my internal arrangements."

He went to the cupboard and helped himself liberally to its contents, talking volubly the while.

"Verily, when grimalkin leaveth the kitchen unguarded, then will the playful mice resume their gambols. Seemingly! Wonder whar my pard is all this time? Guess I'll go an' 'vestigate."

Billy left the cabin and went directly to the ruins. Remembering his former experience, he approached the entrance more cautiously this time. But there was no need of caution, for there was no one lying in wait for him. Neither was Philip anywhere to be seen.

"Guess I might ez well git what I come after afore," and he went to the door of the room where the girl captive was, and there found his knife where he had dropped it.

After he had satisfied himself that Philip was not there, he went outside and took his way toward the beach. On his way he was suddenly startled by hearing an exclamation only a short distance ahead of him.

"There he is, now! Seize him!"

He at once suspected who had been seized, and his first impulse was to dash forward to his assistance, but a second thought convinced him that it would be unwise to do so, for he could see there were three of the men, and he knew that they were more than a match for two boys like himself and Philip. He knew that, instead of being of any assistance to his friend he would himself be captured; while if he kept quiet and followed them, he might be able to help him later, though he fully realized that he could do nothing against them by force.

The night was dark and they did not suspect his proximity, although he was only a few feet away. He hoped by keeping near them to hear their conversation, and thus gain some idea of what their intentions were. They said nothing, however, which gave him any light on the matter, but when they all entered the boat taking Philip with them, he began to understand at least that his friend was in danger.

How he could help him was a question that now agitated his mind. There was no other boat near with which he could follow them. Then how could he keep near Philip? His active mind soon suggested a plan and he hesitated not to put it in execution.

As soon as the boat was shoved off into deeper water, and during the slight confusion attending their getting seated in their proper places, Billy slipped into the water and, diving below the surface, came up just in the rear of the boat.

Then grasping a projection with one hand, he trailed along in their rear with his whole body submerged. Only one hand and his head were above the surface, and being out of sight of those in the boat, they were of course unaware of his presence.

"It are gittin' ter be a matter o' pressin' importance to this hyer court," muttered Billy to himself, "whar this procession are headin' fur."

Suddenly the boat stopped, and Billy, at imminent risk of his own safety, drew himself up so that he could see what was transpiring in the boat. One glance was sufficient. He saw that a rope was being tied around Philip's body, and that to the other end of the rope was attached a stone.

He comprehended the situation in an instant, and was prepared for what followed a moment later.

He heard the order given to swing him off, and the moment the body struck the water he dove, and so nicely did he calculate his distance that his outstretched hand caught the rope which was drawing Philip down to his death.

In the other hand he held his knife, which he had drawn from his pocket and opened while waiting for them to throw him over, and in a

moment he had severed the rope. They had hardly risen to the surface before he had also cut the cords which bound his hands.

Immediately after casting Philip overboard the assassins had resumed their oars and rowed away, so that when the boys reached the top of the water the small portion of their bodies that was above the surface would not have been visible in the darkness even had they been looking for them.

They were not a great distance from the shore, and they began to swim as noiselessly as possible in that direction. Philip did not know who his rescuer was, and they both maintained a strict silence for fear of being heard by the men in the boat, but when they emerged from the water and climbed the sandy beach, he recognized him.

"Kim on," said Billy, as soon as they reached *terra firma*. "We'll reserve all joodicial formalities till we git ter some place where we ain't likely ter git gobbled."

They passed along the beach and up the rocks into the cave. Philip went to the shelf where he had deposited his purchases from Setback, and produced a package of candles, one of which was soon lighted.

Then followed mutual explanations. Billy related his adventures since the time he left his companion on the hill above the ruins, and told him of the passage which led from the room where he was confined to the cellar beneath his grandmother's cabin.

"May not this passage you speak of connect also with the room where the girl is?" asked Philip.

"Shouldn't be 'tall s'prised. An', 'nother thing, ther gal said as how she was kep' by a horrible old woman. Now, o' course, I don't want ter be understood as speakin' anyways disrespectful towards my 'spectable grandmarm, nor callin' of her a horrible old woman nor nothin' o' that kind, but 'twouldn't require a very lively 'magination ter idenkify her with ther 'foresaid keeper."

"It is quite possible she is. If so it is not strange that she is anxious to keep strangers away from her cabin."

"Now, then, what d'ye say about splorin' this hyer cave? We've got a light now, an' kin see whar we're goin'."

"That is just what I would like to do, and there is no time like the present."

"Gi'e me ther loommary then, an' kim on, an' we'll penetrate our way inter ther entrails o' ther earth."

Billy led the way along the passage closely followed by his companion. The path was irregular and uneven, and, but for the candle to light their way, they would have had a sorry time of it, clambering over the sharp rocks which in many places obstructed the passage.

Sometimes the roof rose to a height of several feet above their heads, and the sides expanded into a goodly-sized room; again, the passage became so contracted as to render it scarcely possible for them to make their way, often obliging them to crawl for some distance on their hands and knees to avoid the low-hanging roof.

At length they reached a point where several passages diverged in various directions. On one side, however, was a wall of stone and adobes which Billy recognized as the cellar-wall of the ruins.

They saw a door through which he had so strangely made his escape; also another which they conjectured must open to the room where the young girl was confined. This door, like the one by which Billy had made his escape, had no knob, latch or lock, and the boy gave it as his opinion that it could be opened only by some trick known to those who were in the secret.

"An' it's ther 'pinion o' ther court that my 'spectable grandmarm is in ther secret all over. An' Cap'n Scowler, he's another. Now, ther question arises, an' comes afore us, an' troubles us. How aire we goin' ter git ther aforesaid maiden outer durance vile? Ef we only knew ther Open Sesame o' this hyer business, we shed be all right, but ther way she stands now it don't look very encouraging."

"Which one of these passages leads to your grandmother's cabin?"

"I'll be demolished ef I know. There's so many of 'em, an' they all look pooty much alike. When I traveled this road afore, this artemoon, I wa'n't aware o' there bein' only one."

"Well, I propose that we explore them, one by one, until we find out. It is possible that if we succeed in rescuing the girl, that we shall do so from this point, and I think it will be well first to know our ground."

"I reckon ye'r right. Mabbe we should want ter gain ther outer world through my 'specta-

ble grandmarm's sullen, fur 'twouldn't be very handy fur a gal ter climb down over them rocks at the mouth of the cave, 'sides gittin' of her feet wet a-wadin' through ther water arter she got down."

They entered one of the corridors, which, as they proceeded, they found to be intersected by many others running in all directions and forming a perfect network. They were all irregular and uneven, like the one leading toward the sea, and the boys had no little difficulty in making their way in some places.

"I don't b'lieve this is the way I come this P. M.," said Billy, "'cause whar I went there wa'n't so many crooks an' turns, nor I didn't notice no paths crossin' one way an' t'other."

"Then, if you are satisfied this is not the right way, perhaps we had better return and try another."

They were about to turn and retrace their steps, when suddenly the candle which Billy carried was snatched from his hand and dashed to the floor, immediately extinguishing it.

"Hi! there, git out! By ther great Hebrew moralizer, that are a pooty flop! Who d'ye spose done that? Ghost er goblin, durn their pictur's!"

"Hark!" said Philip, listening.

They heard a discordant mixture of screech and laughter, which, echoing through the vaulted passages, sounded wild and horrible in the extreme.

"Whew! that sounds kinder cheerful and sociable, don't it? Gosh all screw-driver! Ain't this dark? How we goin' ter git out of this pesky hole?"

CHAPTER VI.

A COWARDLY ASSAULT.

SETBACK CITY!

Although so christened by its ambitious settlers, it was really a small and insignificant place compared to towns usually dignified by the name of city.

A small mining-town situated on the coast to the north of Mendocino, on the one side washed by the waters of the broad Pacific, and on the other overshadowed by the rocky peaks of the Coast Range.

At the time of which we write Setback City was in the heyday of its glory. Its mine, Golden Sheaves, owned and operated by residents of the place, was yielding up its yellow product right liberally. Its ever changing population consisted of miners, hunters, laborers of every class, saloon-keepers, store-keepers, thieves, plunderers, gamblers and some few gentlemen (?) of leisure.

Its stores, necessarily well patronized, its saloons, also considered a necessity in every mining-town, its dance-houses, and its hotel were in a thriving condition.

Into this town rode a man, on the day that Billy Bombshell had discovered Philip Alderson floating in the water, and, dismounting in front of the hotel, resigned his horse to the care of the waiting hostler.

"Give him shelter. Give him water. Give him feed," he said to that individual, as he led the horse away. Then entering the house he approached the proprietor and inquired:

"Can I have a room here?"

"Yes, sir, I think I can accommodate you."

"For an indefinite length of time?"

"Yes, sir, as long as you wish."

"I will pay in advance."

"Very well."

"And board?"

"Yes, sir; we can furnish you with board."

"When I wish it. Do you know Barton Leonard? Is he stopping here? Is he alone?"

"Yes; there is a gentleman of that name stopping here, and I think he is alone; at least I have never seen any one with him, except men belonging in Setback."

The stranger asked no more questions, but went out and walked down the street, glancing about here and there with the evident object of familiarizing himself with the location of the various stores, saloons and other public places.

He was an ordinary-looking man, with nothing in his appearance to indicate that he was in any way different from a hundred others who visited the place, some to stay, and others to float away again to seek other fields of excitement when life here became monotonous, or when driven forth by the angry miners for some unusually dark deed.

He had registered his name as Lawrence Felton, but that might or might not be his true name, for a man in this wild, out-of-the-way place might call himself what he pleased and none know the difference.

He entered the saloons one after another, as he

came to them, with his keen eyes ever on the alert, taking note of everything. After he had studied the character of the place for a few minutes, and carefully observed the loungers and players, he would quietly take his leave and pass on to some other.

He had nearly completed the round of these places, when his keen eyes noted a man coming up the street.

"Ah! there you are," he said softly. "Barton Leonard. So he is here. What is he doing in this place? But I will soon know. He seems quite at home."

Leonard, as Felton had called him, passed on up the street, and the latter followed him at a distance. He did not go to the hotel, but kept on up the street till he arrived at a small cabin on the outskirts of the town.

While Felton had been visiting the various saloons night had been coming on, and now it was getting nearly dark. He saw Leonard enter the cabin, and he wished it was dark enough so he might creep up beside it and hear what was going on inside.

But this was impossible; the only thing he could do was to wait for the reappearance of Barton Leonard, and then keep him in sight. While he was waiting he saw a girl come from the opposite side of the cabin and walk away toward the north at a rapid pace.

Leonard soon appeared, followed by a man to whom he seemed to be giving some directions. The latter turned and went away in the same direction which the girl had pursued, though she was now nowhere in sight.

Leonard now returned toward the center of the town, followed by Felton, who took particular care to conceal the fact that he was watching him. Night had now come on, but there appeared to be more life and activity than there had been during the day. The miners had returned from their work and were collecting in the various saloons to drink and gamble away their day's earnings, or some more fortunate than the rest to increase their pile by winning from their fellows, to be fleeced in turn, by the professional gamblers and card-sharps of the place.

To one of these saloons Leonard bent his steps, and, entering, took a seat at one of the tables. Here he was soon joined by two other men, and the three were presently engaged in earnest conversation.

"How did you find things up at the ruins?" he inquired of one of the men.

"Everything snug and tidy, an' ther old woman as sarsy as ever."

"Who is this young cub they call the Cliff-Climber?"

"My pard kin tell you more about him than I kin; he made his acquaintance this artemoon down on ther beach, eh, Sam?"

"Confound ther brat!" replied Sam Tanner. "I'll tan him fur that trick, one of these fine days."

"What happened?" inquired Leonard.

Sam Tanner told the story of his brush with Bombshell Billy, coloring it to suit his liking.

"An' ter end up with, ther cussed little bed-bug ketched up a handful of sand an' threw it in my eyes, an' Tom Parsons sot there a-grinning all ther time, an' let him git away."

"This is not the first instance I have heard of people having sand thrown in their eyes. You say there was another lad with him. What kind of a looking fellow was he?"

Tom Parsons gave a description of him, and when he had finished Leonard spoke again:

"I saw these boys a short time ago, as I was returning from a trip up on the mountains, and one of them I know. It would have been more to the purpose, Sam Tanner, if you had paid your attention to the older lad and tossed him into the sea, after you had rung his neck. I do not know how it is he turns up here; I supposed that his case was settled. It will make but little difference, though, for I have sent Ben Garrett to fix him, and the other one, too. If he fails in this to-night you two must take the job into your own hands, and see to it that you fail not. You understand, that boy must never leave this place alive."

"I'll tan him, fur sure, if I git after him," said Sam.

"Look out fur sand, though," replied Tom.

While they had been talking Felton had entered the place and taken a seat at a table near them. His attention seemed to be fully occupied in watching the motley crowd scattered about the room, but his keen eyes shot an occasional quick glance toward the table where the three plotters were seated.

His object had been to hear their conversation, but in this he was foiled, for they spoke in

so low a tone that not a word was intelligible to his ears. In a short time the three separated. Leonard left the room, and the two men joined another group and commenced playing poker.

Felton, too, soon went out and went to the hotel, and, shortly afterward, to his room. He felt well satisfied with his work so far. He had found Barton Leonard, and, although he had as yet learned nothing of the latter's object and intentions in visiting this place, he believed all that, with patience and perseverance, would come in good time.

"Those men he was talking with in the saloon were hard-looking characters. They are his tools. No doubt. The man whose cabin he visited is another. He sent him away on some errand. Perhaps I had done better to follow the hiring than watch the master. We shall see. In the morning I will renew my espial. I will learn the names of these men I saw with him in the saloon. I will also endeavor to ascertain the errand of the other man."

Thus communing with himself, as he was wont to do, he fell asleep. But at an early hour the following morning he was astir, and took a position at his window, which looked upon the street, and watched for the appearance of any one whom he knew.

His patience was rewarded at last; Leonard came out of the house, and at the same moment a man coming down the street approached him. They stopped near the house and almost under Felton's window, which he had partly opened when he first took up his position there.

Leonard looked hastily around, and seeing no one was near them, addressed the new-comer:

"Well, Ben, what luck? Did you dispose of the business as I directed?"

"I found 'em all right, boss, in a hole in their rocks where I knew their little 'un usually lodged. I crawled in kinder careful like, thinkin' they'd be asleep an' not know nothin' 'bout it; but jest as I'd got snugly in an' was feelin' fur 'em, out they scooted quicker'n scat, an' off they run like two dorgs with tin-cans tied to their tails."

"And so they got away from you?"

"Yas. I out an' chased 'em for a spell, but they run like wild-cats an' was out o' sight an' hearin' less'n a minute. I went back an' hung round their place for a spell, thinkin' they might come back, but they didn't come fur a cent. But don't you worry, boss, but what I shall claim ther money fur ther job yet. They've got away this time, but I'll fix 'em afore I git through."

Felton was considerably interested in this conversation, and he leaned his head further out of the window, than was, perhaps, under the circumstances, judicious. Leonard suddenly looked up and saw him. The watcher at once withdrew his head, but he heard no more. The others moved away.

"That was bad," he muttered. "I did not dream of his looking up. Now he knows that I heard all that was said. It will not be so easy to watch him in the future. Very likely he will watch me. Sorry I was so rash. Very bad!"

He went down-stairs and had his breakfast, and then he went outside. As he did so he saw Leonard and his companions of the previous night standing on the opposite side of the street, but if he had looked back he might have seen Leonard pointing him out to the two men who were with him.

"That is the man," he said to them, as Felton walked away. "I don't know how much he heard, but I have no doubt he heard altogether too much for our good and his own safety. You know what to do without my telling you, only be sure and do it quietly. And it had better be done quickly, ere he has time to spin a yarn to other inquisitive fools like himself."

"Never fear but he shall be tended to. I see'd him in ther saloon last night while we was talkin', but he wa'n't very near us, and didn't 'pear ter be listenin', so I didn't mind nothin' 'bout him."

"All the more reason why he should have a quietus."

"Will you fix him?" replied Tom.

"And when you have finished him meet me near the Ruined Ranch. I am going there this afternoon to see old Hannah. Ben Garrett failed in the job I set him at last night. He promised to succeed better to-day, but if we can run across the boys we will make a sure thing of it."

In the mean time Felton had walked on, and he saw Billy Bombshell and Philip when they came into the town. They passed quite near him and he looked keenly at the latter, and then turned and retraced his steps, keeping them in sight.

"There is something familiar about that lad,"

he said, softly. "Where can I have seen him before? I cannot place him. Surely I have seen him somewhere. Or perhaps some one like him. But where?"

During the afternoon he was wandering aimlessly about the place, having lost sight of both Leonard and his tools—as he felt sure they were—when he came near a cabin on the outside of the village, and somewhat isolated from all others.

Suddenly, as he was passing, two men sprung out from behind the cabin where they had been concealed, and attacked him. One of them struck him a heavy blow with a club which felled him to the earth like a log; the second man gave him a thrust in the breast with a long knife as he lay unconscious, and then both fled from the spot, leaving him where he lay.

CHAPTER VII.

"I WILL FOIL HIM!"

THE assassins had no idea, after such a blow and knife-thrust as they had given him, but that he was dead, and had the villain's knife reached the point for which it was aimed Lawrence Felton's career would have been then and there checked forever.

But the point of the knife struck a metal button on an inside garment and glanced away so as to cause only a slight flesh wound, scarcely more than skin deep. The blow from the other man's cudgel was a more serious affair, although not fatal.

It rendered him immediately unconscious, in which state he remained for hours. It was quite dark when he recovered so as to realize his condition, or what was going on around him. Some one was bending over him in a kindly attitude and bathing his head and face.

"Who is this?" he feebly inquired.

"A friend," was the reply, "if you are an honest man. How came you here, and in this condition?"

The voice was that of a girl, and kind and gentle. He felt that he had fallen in good hands, though he did not at first fully understand how he came to be so situated, but the dull pain in his head soon caused him to remember, and he said:

"Thank you. I think I am an honest man. I was attacked by two villains. I remember that one of them had a heavy club. The other had a long knife in his hand. There was a blow on my head. After that, I remember nothing."

"How came you here? What is your name?"

"My name is Molly Garrett," she said. "I was returning from an errand up the coast when I heard you moan."

"Do you know who it was that assaulted you?"

"I do not know their names. I have seen them before. I saw them with Barton Leonard. I see now. I see how it is," and he made an effort to sit up. "Leonard was talking under my window. He knew I overheard what he said. So he set his tools on me. He was talking with these men when I came from the hotel. The other man's name was Ben—something."

"Was it Ben Garrett?" asked the girl.

"I do not know. I heard Leonard call him Ben. What his other name was I don't know."

"Very likely it was Ben Garrett, my uncle, for I know they have been together a good deal lately, and I know he went to see him this morning."

Felton now made an effort to get upon his feet, but he grew dizzy and was obliged to lie down again. It was evident he could not return to the hotel without help, and it occurred to him that perhaps it would be just as well not to return. The villains who had made the attack on his life supposed him to be dead; if he should return to the hotel they would be undeceived. Then they might make a second attack, and do their work more thoroughly.

But what should he do in the mean time? He glanced around him. There was no habitation near him except the small cabin near which he lay.

"Who occupies this cabin?" he asked.

"There is no one lives here now," replied Molly. "The miner who owned it was killed in a fight not long ago, and since then it has been unoccupied. Do you want me to help you to get in there?"

"I think I will try to get inside. I have not strength enough to return to the hotel at present. And perhaps it is as well not to return now," and he told her his reasons for wishing the parties who had made the attack to think they had done their work well. When he had regained his strength it would not matter so much, for he was now forewarned and would then be better prepared to resist any further attempt.

With Molly's assistance he gained the inside

of the cabin, where the girl made him as comfortable as possible.

"Do you know who the boys were that Leonard sent this Ben to attack last night?" he asked.

"How did you know of that?" she asked, in return.

"I heard Leonard and Ben talking. Garrett said the boys got away from him. He said he would fix them to-day. Do you know who they are?"

"One is called Billy Bombshell. I have never seen the other till to-day, and I do not know his name, but I am sure he does not live in Set-back."

Molly soon left the cabin to go to her own home, while Felton composed himself to sleep. He had no fear that the girl would betray him to his enemies, although she had acknowledged that she was the niece of a would-be assassin. She had been too kind to him to now prove a traitor. He had not seen her face, for it was too dark to admit of that, but her voice was mild and gentle, and he had no fears for his safety as far as she was concerned. But he had no desire to meet Barton Leonard, or any of his tools, until he was in a better condition to defend himself than at present.

The blow upon his head had been a heavy one, and whenever he attempted to rise it caused his senses to reel, but he hoped by the morrow to be on his feet again and go about his business.

He was on the point of dropping to sleep when he was aroused by the sound of approaching footsteps. They came nearer and nearer and at last stopped just outside the cabin. It was Barton Leonard and his two companions returning from their visit to the neighborhood of the ruins.

They had left their boat at the upper end of the town, and were now en route to their usual lounging-places. Leonard was going to see Ben Garrett, and parted with his companions at this point. Before leaving them he gave them some directions as to where he might find them later, after he had seen Garrett.

"Now that we have disposed of that cursed boy, there is nothing to hinder me from returning East with the girl," he said. "I have that young viper caged where he will do no harm at present, and I will keep him there until I am ready to leave this cursed country."

"Say, boss, when ye git ready ter let him out give me ther job," said Sam Tanner. "I've got an account to settle with the little brat. I'll tan his hide fur him fur fillin' my eyes full o' sand."

"Shall ye leave ther gal in ther ruins till ye git ready ter start?" asked Parsons.

"Yes; I have no other place I can take her to, unless I should take her to the hotel; and if I should do that I should be afraid of something occurring to upset my plans."

"Wal, thar won't no one suspect that she's in ther ruins, an' if they did they'd hev hard work ter git at her."

"I'm not so sure of that. Those boys have been fooling around there and, I presume, suspect, even if they do not actually know, that some one is confined there. But I have no more fear of them; one is at the bottom of the sea, and the other is where it will trouble him some to release himself, to say nothing of the girl."

"Was it because of his pokin' his nose where he hadn't orter, that ye throwed ther young chap ther fishes?"

"That is none of your business. As long as you are well paid for your part in the job, it won't pay you to be too inquisitive. He couldn't have got the girl away, even if he had known she was there; but I had good reasons for wishing him out of the way. I had supposed the job done long before now, but this time it is a sure thing. Now, you two go on, and remember to be ready for business to-morrow morning. I shall rely on you to get things in readiness to start for Mendocino to-morrow night. I am going now to see Garrett."

During this conversation Felton had lain very quiet. He feared to make the least noise, lest these men, hearing it, should enter the cabin and discover him, and it was with a feeling of relief that he heard their retreating footsteps. He expected every moment while they remained that they would remember the man they had stricken down near there and look for his body, but their later crime seemed to occupy their minds, and he was safe from them for the present.

But if they had looked for his body where he had fallen? Failing to find it there, would they not have searched the cabin?

The conversation which he had overheard next occupied his thoughts.

"Ah! it is as I thought," he muttered. "He knows where the girl is. He probably knew when he left New York. No doubt she was taken by his direction. He said she is at the ruins. What ruins? Where are they? That I will find out to-morrow. I will foil him. Perhaps Molly Garrett can tell me where the ruins are. I will ask her in the morning. And they have committed murder again since I saw them. That boy I saw this morning. They said he was at the bottom of the sea. The other little lad is confined at the ruins. Those ruins must be a famous place. That boy's face was strangely familiar. What is Leonard's reason for wishing him out of the way? Ah! can it be possible? Is this the boy that was lost fifteen years ago? His face was wonderfully like the family. Barton Leonard murder him? For what? Ay! I see it all. I remember well. His purpose now is plain. Will he succeed? Not if I live. I will foil him. Why could I not have thought of this in the morning? I could then have saved the boy. But Sadie is alive. She shall be saved!"

He was weary and exhausted, and he soon fell asleep. But his sleep was filled with dreams of the ideas that had so lately occupied his mind, for, ever and anon, his lips would form the words:

"I will foil him!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRISON EMPTY—THE CAPTIVE GONE.

IN the afternoon of the following day Barton Leonard left the hotel and walked away to the north. His destination was the Ruined Ranch, which in due time he reached. His preparations were nearly completed, and it was his intention to leave Setback that night.

"Sadie must think I have come to effect her rescue, which, indeed, is true, now that the time has arrived for us to return. But she must not suspect that I am, or was, at all interested in keeping her captive, and to that end she must not see me in consultation with old Hannah. She is too young to suspect, and she will look upon me as her best friend. I will first see how the young spitfire is getting along."

With this he went to the door of the room where he had placed Billy Bombshell the night before, and rapped upon it. There was no stir within, and he repeated his raps. But there was no reply.

"Perhaps the youngster is asleep," he said, and taking a key from his pocket he unlocked the door which opened, as it had done the night before, without any effort on his part. He looked within, but saw nothing of the boy. He stepped inside and looked again, but Billy was not there.

"How in the name of wonder can he have got out of this room? He must have had help from the outside, for old Hannah told me he knew nothing of the secret of this room. She does not love him any too well, I'll warrant, and I am sure she would not assist him to escape, and, besides, she cares too much for my money to set free a prisoner."

He left the room with a deep scowl on his face, and shut the door with a bang. He then made his way to the other door. Before opening it he cleared his face of the scowls, forcing himself to smile instead, for he wished the child to be favorably impressed.

He inserted the key in the lock and forced back the bolt. The door immediately swung open as the other had done.

And this soon like the other—was empty!

Leonard turned pale and stared. Where was the girl whom he had expected would leap forward so joyously to meet him?

"In the fiend's name, what is the meaning of this?" he ejaculated. "Is it possible she has escaped?"

He had been angry before, when he had found the boy gone, for when baffled in any direction his wrath was sure to be stirred to its depths. But now he was not only angry, but alarmed, for, if she had escaped, and he could not regain possession of her, his long-cherished plans would come to naught.

"Perhaps the old Witch, Hannah, has removed her to some other place, though she assured me that there was none safer than this to be found. If the old hag plays me false, her life shall pay the forfeit. But it cannot be; she dare not. She knows too well that I am not to be trifled with. Ah! Is there any connection between that little tiger's escape from the other room and her strange disappearance? No; for, sharp as he is, he is not smart enough to open that door without the key, and I warrant there is not another like it in Setback."

He leaned against the side of the room and remained lost in thought for several minutes. Evidently his meditations were not of the most pleasant character, for his scowls deepened and his face grew dark with concentrated wrath. He did not remain long in this passive attitude, but starting up with an oath, left the ruins and went toward the old Witch's cabin.

"Woe to the old crone if she has allowed the girl to escape!" he muttered.

On his arrival at old Hannah's cabin he was destined to be still further disappointed. The house was empty; the old Witch was not there!

"I will wait for her return," he said, seating himself in a chair. Although now more quiet his anger was none the less deep, and his dark looks and gleaming eyes, fierce with wrath, boded ill to the old Witch when she returned.

But she did not return, and he soon went outside to look for her.

How was it that Sadie was not in the prison-room?

A short time before Leonard came to look for her, old Hannah had taken her from the place, through the passage to her own cabin.

Sadie, in her childish innocence, was overjoyed at her deliverance, but her gladness was soon to be changed to bitterness.

An older and more experienced person would have noticed a change in the appearance of the old woman. Although at all times peculiar, her manner was now still more so, and her eyes and, indeed, her whole face, wore a wilder and more fierce expression than usual.

Usually taciturn, she was now quite the reverse, but her words and meaning were often unintelligible.

Sometimes wild shrieks of laughter would break from her lips, followed, perhaps, by a low moan, and then her face would assume a sad, subdued expression, and her gaze be lost in vacancy.

Anon she went to the door of her cabin and looked out on the broad Pacific, muttering the while, with wild, grotesque gestures:

"Nay, rave not so ceaselessly, Father Neptune," she said; "the sacrifice is ready—a sweet, pretty flower; surely, his wrath must be appeased by so fair an offering. Hence! leave me, demons! Curse ye for a pack of howling vampires! Know ye not your mistress? She was the sweetest, fairest, loveliest of all earth's flowers, and as she lay thus in her white shroud a horrible, icy chill crept over me! Many a time have I heard the cock crow shrill at the darkest hour of night! Ay! and the owl hoot, hoot, and have seen the blind bat play hide and seek with the dark shadows. Ha! what seek ye here? Get thee back to the devil, thy master, and say old Hannah sent thee! Ay! moan and groan, ye sons of men, under your heavy burdens of sin and toil! The time is not yet come!"

Sadie could not fail to notice, child though she was, that something was wrong and she shrunk away from the woman in alarm.

"Nay! shrink not, my pretty flower! Old Neptune shall fold you in his arms and kiss your sweet face, and all may yet be well. Creep on, creep on, ye slow hours of time! Let the silver-tongued bells ring out their merry peals! To-morrow I'll be wed!"

"Woe is me! woe, woe! the water in the pot did bubble, seethe and foam but yestere'en! The fire did crackle merrily, and I heard the spirit of the wood hiss and sputter in his anger! Then the elfin shapes arose in the blaze, and shook their long arms and mocked me! Come out in the wildwood and weave a garland for your pretty tresses, sweet child! Old Neptune waits; the hour is nigh!"

"Where are we going, Hannah, tell me?" she cried, as the old dame grasped her by the arm and led her outside.

"We go to seek our lovers in the leafy bowers of the joyous wood; the birds sing merrily. So, come quickly! The time is ripe! Ripe, I say!"

She hurried toward the shore, dragging the helpless child with her. The tide was out, but it was now beginning to flow in again, and was slowly but surely creeping up the beach. Hannah had brought with her a light rope and a stout stake both evidently previously prepared. First she tied the shrinking and alarmed child's feet and hands. Then throwing her down on the sands she proceeded to drive the stake deep into the yielding sand—using a heavy stone as a hammer. This done she placed little Sadie up against the stake and with the rope secured her to it, unheeding her cries for mercy—her piteous pleading for life. The girl, of course, realized her danger, for, although the water had not yet reached her, she knew that when

the tide had risen to its full flood, its waves would cover her completely.

But, she might as well plead for mercy to the cliffs above her, old Hannah, in her insane frenzy, had brought her here as an offering to the god of the wave, and she watched the water, as it rose nearer and nearer the helpless child, with a wild delight. She stretched her hands toward the sea and her laughter rung out high and shrill.

"Come on, come on, ye ocean spirits! The sacrifice is ready! The hour is nigh! the hour is nigh! Hark! hear the merry, merry singing! I come, I come!"

She turned away and sped up the beach in the direction of her cabin, leaving Sadie watching the water creeping toward her, inch by inch, each wave, as the tide rose, coming nearer and nearer. An hour at most and the cruel waves would claim her as their prey.

CHAPTER IX.

PHILIP AND THE OLD WITCH.

WE left Billy Bombshell and Philip in the cave. Their light was, of course, extinguished when it was snatched from Billy's hand, and thrown with such violence upon the floor, and they were left in utter darkness. The boy dropped upon his hands and knees and began searching for the candle. It was not long before he recovered it and rose to his feet.

"Got any match?" he asked Philip, as he regained an upright position. "I've got ther loominary, only it wants ter be touched off 'fore it'll shed a meller luster o'er ther scene."

"I have no matches," replied Philip, "and my clothing is so wet that, even if I had, I am afraid they would not be in a very good condition."

"That settles it; then we sha'n't have any meller luster. I wish I had a face like ther bartender up ter ther Salamander. His face shines so's 'twould light us out o' this jest ez easy ez a fish swims. Mortal Jeesswax! this are wuss'n 'twas this arternoon when I was a prisoner o' war, 'cause then I knew whar I was, an' now I'm blessed ef I know anything about it."

"What do you think it was that did the business for our light?"

"Wal, ef I was a believer in ghosts and gossings, an' them things, I should hev my doubts; but ez long ez I don't, my doubts are few. In view o' ther evidence, I give it ez my 'pinion that an aged female relative o' mine was ther principal actor in that there tragedy. I've heern that melliferous screech o' hern too often ter be mistook."

"But if it was she, what could have been her object?"

"I give it up, 'less 'twas a nateral disposition fur deviltry. She's an out-an'-outer, she is, an' up ter all kinds o' games. But ther question which are now disturbing my peace o' mind, is what we're goin' ter do next? D'ye s'pose ye kin find ther way back where we come? If we could git back ter whar the iron door is, we'd be all right."

"Which way did we come?" asked Philip, quietly.

"Which way did we come?" echoed Billy. "I'm blessed if I know!"

In moving about in the dark, since the loss of their candle, they had become so confused and bewildered that they knew not which course to take in order to retrace their steps.

To add to their confusion they found that they were at the junction of two passages, but which one of the two they had been following they were unable to tell. The only way for them to do was to select one of the paths at random, and that, so far from helping them out of their difficulty, might lead them into still deeper labyrinths.

"Wal, I move we set down an' hold a council-o'-war ter determine what's ter be done. Gosh all terbacker-juice! There's no great loss 'thout some small gain. I gather a good deal of comfort from this fact, that ez long ez we're commured in this solitary place, old Scowler an' his stalactites can't git at us."

"I think I should prefer to take my chances with the known dangers outside than the unknown here."

"Git out! ye make me think o' what ther play-actor said, 'Tis thought by every cuss, past an' future things seem best; ther present wuss."

"Then you would rather stay here, would you?"

"Wal, I might ez well say so till I see some chance o' gittin' out. A contented mind is a joel wu'th a good deal. But, I say, does ary plan suggest itself ter ye ter git on ter ther high road ter ther outside world?"

"I know of no other plan than to select one of these passages at random, and follow it. There are so many of them that we are likely to stray from one another, and may wander about for hours without being nearer the point we started for than at the beginning, but it is our only chance; we can certainly gain nothing by standing still."

"I reckon ye're right. We've got to go it blind. Ther prospect now is that ther leetle gal at ther rooins will come an' rescue us, before we shall her. Now, ther court has got another proposition to make, an' that is that we squat right now an' here an' take a snooze. Ther somsniferous infloence hev been ter work on me fur some time. How does ther ijee strike ye?"

Philip was tired and sleepy as well as his companion, and although he would have much preferred going to sleep in the outer cave overlooking the sea, he said nothing. He was less light-hearted and careless than Billy, and would rather have made an attempt to reach the open air now and sleep afterward.

But he knew that it was strongly probable that they would wander a long time, having no light and nothing to guide them, in the intricacies of the cave before they found themselves free.

"You must wake an' call on me early, fur I'm ter be queen o' May, or April fool, I dunno which," quoth Billy, as he curled himself up.

How long they slept they had no means of knowing, but they awoke much refreshed. The sun might be shining outside in all his brightness, but no ray of light penetrated here. The same inky darkness was around them as before they slept.

Billy arose and shook himself very much as a shaggy dog will do on coming from the water.

"Aire ye ready ter start, or do ye want ter wait till after breakfast?" he asked.

"I am afraid we should not start for some time if we waited for that," was the reply.

"Who is goin' ter head ther procession?"

"You, if you wish to, but be careful and not get hurt. Go slowly and carefully, for we do not know what is before us."

"Well, then, we will go this way fur a guess. Aire ye ready? Eyes front! Forward, march!"

At first their progress was slow, for they were obliged to feel their way along, and in places the path was rough and uneven. Many times they narrowly escaped bumping their heads against projecting rocks. But as they grew used to feeling their way in the darkness, they progressed more rapidly.

Billy walked much faster than Philip cared to go, and the latter often found himself being left in the rear, but a little extra exertion would soon bring him to his place by his companion's side, only to find him lagging again a few minutes later.

This was repeated several times, and at last as he aroused himself from a fit of abstraction into which he had fallen, he found himself so far behind that the sound of Billy's footsteps was not audible. He hurried forward with as much speed as he dared, but he did not overtake him as easily as he had done before.

After going some distance he stopped and listened, but he could hear no sound of Billy, or anything to indicate that he was anywhere near him. He called to him, but there was no reply. Again he called, and louder, but his only answer was the echo of his own voice.

He had unconsciously deviated from his path some distance back, and all the time he had been hurrying forward he had been going from, instead of toward, his companion. He had entered a passage which deflected slightly to the left, and had followed it for some time without knowing he was not in the same course as that pursued by Billy.

But for the last few minutes he knew he had been walking more rapidly than they had at any time since they started; still he had not overtaken him. Neither had his calls elicited any reply. Where then could he be?

At last the truth dawned upon him; that in the darkness they had become separated. What should he do? If he went back to look for his young friend it was probable he might search for hours without being any nearer him than he was now, and if he was left to himself, Billy was just as likely to reach the outer air as they were together.

So Philip determined to push on and do his best to get out of the cave. How long he wandered in and out among the passages he knew not, nor had he any means of judging, but at length he saw a gleam of light just ahead of him. Hastening forward he saw that the light came from an aperture in the cliff, but

it was so small that he had some doubts about being able to squeeze himself through it.

He removed his coat and after working a few minutes he had the satisfaction of finding himself once more standing in a full flood of bright sunshine. The ruins were but a few rods away on the small plateau above him, while in front, and not far away, lay the smiling sea, creeping slowly up the white, sandy beach. After his long sojourn underground, it seemed good to him to gaze upon its smooth surface, although its treacherous waters had twice proved so nearly fatal to him.

"I wish I felt sure that Billy would be as successful as I have been. It was mere chance that brought me here, and he may be wandering around among the intricate windings of those passages, perhaps searching for me, or, it may be, come to some harm among the many pitfalls which doubtless lurk unseen in those black places."

He could see that the afternoon was more than half gone, for the sun was well down in its western decline, and he started to put in execution a plan which he had in his mind for assisting Billy Bombshell. He had gone but a few rods when he came face to face with old Hannah, the Witch of the Cliff. Her appearance had changed since he saw her the day before, and he instinctively shrunk away.

"Saw ye those dark birds of omen circling above the cliff in the early morn, and heard ye their voices sounding abroad like a rising knell? They told of the sacrifice, and the winds sung it among the forest leaves."

"Of what sacrifice do you speak, good mother?" asked Philip.

"What do ye here?" she cried, with sudden fury; and then sadly: "I remember ye long ago. Thou wert a fair child. Go back to thy mother, who is mourning for her lost boy!"

These words were fraught with interest to Philip. Might it not be possible that she knew something of his past which was beyond his recollection? Though her brain was shrouded in darkness by insanity's baleful cloud, there might be gleams of reason still. Perhaps she could direct him to his long-lost home.

"Where? where does she wait? Tell me that I may return to her," he said.

"The winds sung a sad, weird song last night, and old Neptune cried out in his anger from the sea-depths; but surely his wrath must be appeased! She was very fair! I watched her till the waves came up and kissed her sweet face. She'll sigh no more in yonder prison! She's free! free! Hush! I had a dream last night! Dost ever dream, fair boy? Mayhap thy dreams are pleasant—so was mine! ha! ha! 'Twas of a burning lake! With demons dancing on its brink! Then came grinning skeletons to me where I lay, and pointed their long, fleshless fingers at me till I grew afraid! They beckoned me to follow them, but I feared the shadows which lurked in the dark places! Why dost thou shrink and tremble so? Dost fear old Hannah of the Cliff? Thou hast never seen thy fair sister, Sadie, nor ever will! Yon bird sings her requiem! Back! back, ye demons, ye have not old Hannah yet!"

With wild cries she sprang away with incredible swiftness for one so old, and mounted the rugged path which led to the plateau above, leaving Philip to wonder at her strange words.

"Can it be possible," he asked himself, "that, in her madness, she has thrown the little captive into the sea? She meant the little maiden of the ruins, for she called her Sadie. And she said she was my sister. Did she tell the truth, or was it the babbling of a maniac? But I must not waste any time here if I would help Billy."

He turned and went down near the water to the rocks which led to the cave. Mounting these to the opening, he entered and soon had a candle lighted. He had resolved to return and search for Billy Bombshell.

We will leave him to carry out this design, while we return to Lawrence Felton whom we left the night before asleep in the deserted cabin at Setback City.

CHAPTER X.

MOLLY TO THE RESCUE.

FELTON slept till quite late the following morning, and when he awoke Molly Garrett was standing near him. She had just entered, bringing him food and water, which she now placed before him.

"Good-morning, sir," she saluted. "I hope you are feeling better. I have brought you something to eat, for I thought you must be hungry by this time, as you had no supper last night."

"Good-morning," he replied. "Thank you for your kindness. I think I feel better than I did last night. I hope I shall be able to be about to-day. There is much for me to do."

He then told her what he had heard after she had left him.

"Barton Leonard is a thorough villain. I suspect he is guilty of more crimes than the murder of that lad last night. He says he is now ready to return East. But he will find his course in the future to be less smooth than he thinks. His crimes shall not go unpunished. He shall be made to know that 'the way of the transgressor is hard.' For years he has kept on his iniquitous course. Retribution will overtake him at last. Where are these ruins I heard them speaking of?"

"They are up the coast, about two miles from here," replied Molly.

"That is the place where he has been keeping little Sadie. Does any one live in these ruins?"

"No one has lived there for a long time," said the girl, who then gave him as much of their history as she knew.

"Does any one live near them?"

"There is an old woman named Hannah, who is called the Witch of the Cliff, who lives in a little cabin quite near the place. She is Billy Bombshell's grandmother."

"Doubtless the child is in her care. She is called the Witch of the Cliff? The right kind of a person for such business. Perhaps the boy would know if there was a child kept a prisoner there. They said they had him in a safe place. He probably knew too much to be allowed his liberty."

"I do not believe he knew that there was any one kept a prisoner at the ruins, unless he learned of it within a few days, or he would have told me. And even if old Hannah had the care of a child there, he would not be likely to know it, for he spends but little of his time at her cabin."

"Perhaps they have this boy, Billy Bombshell, caged in the ruins? I fancy that must be an interesting place. I think I will visit it this afternoon."

"Will you be able to walk so far?"

"I think I will. My head is feeling a great deal better than it did. But it pains me some now. I should not care to be struck like that again. I think I will go down to the hotel by and by. I wish to know what Leonard and his two worthies are about."

"Are you not afraid they will renew their attack upon you?" asked the girl.

"I am not afraid of them. I shall be on the lookout for them now. I am pretty handy with a pistol. If I see any further indication of foul play, I shall not hesitate to use one."

Molly Garrett now left him, and he arose and walked about the cabin. His head whirled some as he paced back and forth, but he soon threw off the dizziness and walked with a firmer step.

He had asked Molly before she went away to communicate with him at the hotel if she chanced to learn anything of interest concerning Leonard and his plans, or of those against whom he was working, and she had promised to do so.

He went outside and walked slowly toward the hotel, keeping a sharp lookout for the two men who had committed the assault on him the previous night. But he saw no one whom he knew, and, continuing his course, soon arrived at the hotel and went directly to his room. Here he remained till noon, watching furtively from his window, meanwhile, for any signs of his enemies. He was about to leave his position and go down-stairs, when he saw Leonard coming up the street.

He entered the hotel, and as Felton did not desire to meet him at that time, he concluded to remain where he was. If he kept out of sight his enemies would suppose that the club and knife had finished him, as they had intended.

"Leonard is probably after his dinner and will not remain very long," thought Felton, as he sat down again to wait.

But in this he was disappointed, for it was more than two hours before he saw him leave the house and walk away.

"Now, I think I'll feed," he said, as he left his room. "Then I'll start for the ruins. I should like to follow and watch him. I must have something to eat first."

He soon left the hotel and started off toward the north. He did not anticipate any trouble in finding the place, for Molly had told him it was on the coast in this direction. It took him some time to walk the two miles, for he was still weak and could not get over the ground very rapidly.

The sun was sinking low in the west when he came in sight of an irregular mass of stones and adobes which he supposed to be the place he was

looking for. He paused a moment to rest and look around.

"I suppose Leonard is somewhere in this vicinity," he thought. "He told the men last night he was coming here this afternoon to get things ready. I may meet him. If I do, I will ask him where Philip Anderson is. I believe the lad he threw into the sea is none other than he."

He went forward again and soon reached the ruins.

Billy Bombshell was an especial favorite of Molly Garrett's, and since Felton told her what Leonard had said about him, she had felt worried lest he should come to some harm. Perhaps, should he chance to be in their way, he would meet the same fate as his handsome, dark-eyed companion.

Let it not be understood that she entertained any sentimental feeling toward Billy, for such was not the case; it was merely a sisterly interest. She admired the little lad for his brave, fearless ways, and he had often done her trifling services which a girl like Molly Garrett always remembers. And now that he was in trouble she would gladly aid him if she could. Molly was a kind-hearted girl, and it grieved her to see any one in pain, or to know that they were in trouble.

Felton had told her of the little girl who was kept a prisoner at the ruins, and straightway her heart went out to her in sympathy. Far away from her mother and home, with no friendly faces about her, what must be her feelings confined in that gloomy place?

The more Molly thought of these two, the more earnestly she wished she could assist them, and in the afternoon she determined to make a visit to the vicinity. Thus it was that, shortly after Philip's interview with old Hannah, Molly came to be walking along the beach near this point.

She was watching the in-coming tide and thinking of the fair young stranger she had met the previous evening not far from here, whose life she believed had gone out in those dark, treacherous waters, sacrificed by Barton Leonard and his men.

Suddenly her eyes became riveted upon an object upon the beach before her.

It was the form of little Sadie! In a second of time her quick eyes took in the whole situation, and for a brief moment she stood still with horror at thought of such a cruel, heartless and cowardly deed.

A helpless child, securely bound, tied to a stake driven in the sand, and left to the mercy of the tide!

"Back! cruel water!" she cried, as she bounded forward toward the motionless form.

The waves receded for an instant as if in obedience to her command, and then a heavier swell rolled up the sand and over the helpless girl.

Molly reached her, and drawing a knife from her pocket, severed the cords which bound her to the stake, but not until old Neptune, as though angry at the loss of his prize, had swept back another great wave to cover her.

Lifting the child in her arms the girl bore her back up the beach out of the way of the tide, and then removed the bonds from her hands and feet.

She knew not what the consequence would be should she be detected in undoing the work which had been done by other hands, nor did she give heed to the idea. Her mission then was to save, which she was doing, reckless of consequences.

The child had become unconscious, doubtless through fright as she lay bound, with so terrible a death staring her in the face. Molly did not wish to remain there, as she knew not how soon the author of the deed might return to learn the result of his cruel act—so, taking the child in her arms again, she climbed the hill to the plateau.

She did not know what course next to pursue. She did not doubt that this was the girl Sadie, of whom Felton had told her, and she wished she might see him and deliver her up to his care. He had said that he intended to visit the vicinity this afternoon, and perhaps he was now somewhere near, and but for the burden in her arms she would have sought for him at the ruins.

While she was debating in her mind what she should do, she had been kneeling on the ground at the top of the hill, trying to revive the child, and her efforts were soon rewarded by signs of returning consciousness. At last she opened her eyes and looked up at the face above her, wondering.

"Where am I?" she asked. "Oh! now I re-

member! Oh! you will not leave me to be drowned by the cruel sea, will you?"

"No, my dear, you are safe now. No harm shall come to you while you are with me. What is your name?"

"Sadie."

"How came you down on the beach?"

"That terrible old woman took me there and left me for Neptune, she said," replied the girl, shuddering.

"You are not afraid of me, are you?" asked Molly. "Will you go away with me?"

"Yes, I will go with you. I know you are good; your face tells me you won't harm me. Did you take me away from the dreadful sea?"

"Yes. Now come, my dear, we must go."

Molly's mind had been busy, while she had been talking, thinking what she should do with the little one while she was looking for Felton. She now had a plan, and she proceeded to execute it.

She did not wish to take Sadie with her for fear of meeting the old Witch, whom she supposed to be the old woman the child said had left her on the beach, or Leonard, who, no doubt, was somewhere in the vicinity.

She had thought of Billy's "hole in the cliff," and that would be a safe place to leave the child while she was looking about to see if Felton was near, and she led the girl in that direction.

Arriving at the place, she took Sadie inside, and told her to remain till she returned, and on no account to expose herself so as to be seen by any one on the outside.

"Do not be afraid," she said; "no one will harm you here, and I shall be gone but a short time. When I return I will take you home with me."

The child promised to do as Molly told her, though it was evident she feared to be left alone.

The latter now went outside and walked away toward the ruins. Old Hannah's cabin lay in her path, and as she approached it she saw Billy Bombshell inside, and she beckoned him to her.

"Hallo! Molly, I'm tickled to see ye."

"Where is your grandmother, Billy?" asked the girl.

"I dunno. The old lady are out jest now. Mebbe she's gone a-sparkin'. Want ter see her?"

"No; but I do want to see Mr. Felton. Have you seen him?" and Molly described that person as well as she could. But Billy shook his head.

"I hain't seen nobody but old Scowler. I've been in durance vile, I have. Mean' Philip hev been explorin' ther subterraneous depths, an' we got ther wust of it."

"Is your friend, then, alive?"

"Well, he was ther last I seen on him."

"But they told me that Leonard threw him in the sea."

"Wal, I should weep. That was ther wust one of all. But ther best laid plans o' mice and men sometimes don't 'mount ter nothin'. Billy Bombshell was 'round 'bout that time, an' he sailed right in on his muscle ter ther salvation o' Petrel Phil."

Billy then gave her a detailed account of the events which had transpired since he had first discovered Philip floating in the sea, three days before.

"An' ther ole vilyun is 'round here som'ers now. I seen him."

"Do you know anything about a little girl named Sadie, who has been a captive at the ruins?"

"Yas. Phil an' me was goin' ter git her out, but I see she ain't thar now. Have you seen her?"

"Yes, she is with me, now, and if you see Mr. Felton you may tell him he will find her at our cabin. I must return to her now, or she will be afraid, being left alone so long."

"An' I must go down inter ther cave an' hunt up Petrel Phil. Look out fur old Scowler, he's a sinner!"

CHAPTER XI.

A TERRIBLE SCREAM.

LET us now return and see how Billy Bombshell had escaped from the cave. At about the same time that Philip had made the discovery that he was alone, Billy had addressed some remark to his companion, whom he supposed to be close in his rear. Not receiving any reply he stopped to ascertain the reason. There was no sound of following footsteps, nor any indications that Philip was anywhere near him.

"Where aire ye?" he asked.

At this time Philip was some distance away in another passage and, of course, did not hear the question, nor did he hear the shouts of Billy, who a moment later began to call to him.

Billy shouted himself hoarse but received no answer, and when at last he made up his mind that his companion had been left behind, he turned about and returned to seek for him.

"He can't hev got ahead of me," said Billy, to himself, "so he must be back hyer somewheres. I've been a-comin' along pooty good jog, an' probably he couldn't keep up. But why the 'tarnal didn't he say so?"

He continued to retrace his steps until he thought he had gone far enough to have reached the point from which they started. He called Philip's name at intervals as he returned, but it was of no avail.

"Consarned pecoolier whar he has got to so sudden. I ain't more'n two-thirds happy over this deal. I wa'n't overly well satisfied before, but she's growing wuss an' wuss, an' I'll be blessed ef I know how it's comin' out, or, what's more ter ther p'int, how I'm comin' out. One thing is pooty evident: Petrel Phil an' me has dissolved partnership fur ther present, an' I might ez well be climbin' fur a purer atmosphere."

Once more he started, paying no attention to which passage he took, for he knew not which was the right one, not even in which direction lay the course which would take him out of the cave. After what seemed to him an interminable length of time, his outstretched hand touched a wall which he knew by the feeling to be built of adobes.

The thought flashed upon his mind that he had reached the ruins, and this was proven a moment later when his hand touched an iron door. While his hands were wandering over it to make sure he was right, his fingers unconsciously pressed a hidden spring, and the door began to slide upward as had the one from which he had escaped the day before.

But one glance within showed him that it was not the same room he had been in, and it suddenly occurred to him that it must be the one in which Sadie was confined. While the door was slowly going up and back he had ample time to survey the inside of the room, though he cautiously remained on the outside.

"Curtain's down. That's ther end o' that scene," said Bill as the door closed with a click. "Twa'n't a particular brilliant scene, nuther. Ther question now before ther joory am: whar's ther leetle gal? That are ther room she occupied, 'cordin' ter ther latest bulletin, but she ain't thar now. Thar's been some *habeas corpus* business here, I guess. I'll recominate on this later."

Bill had now no difficulty, for he knew the course he wished to take and there was but one passage in that direction. That was the one which led to the sea, and which he and Philip had followed when they came in. It was but a short time, therefore, before he found himself in the light and sunshine. Before he left the cave, however, he took one of the candles from the place where Philip had deposited them. He intended to return and search for his friend, but he wished to reach the cave through the cellar of his grandmother's cabin, and toward that point he now bent his steps.

"I wonder if ther ole lady aire ter hum? If she is, there'll probly be music equal ter a hull brass band. I'm thankful I don't inherit her disposition. Arter a clus observation o' her character fur a 'siderable length o' time, I'm forced ter ther conclusion that she ain't amiable."

He approached the cabin, the door of which stood open, and, halting as he reached it, took a careful survey before trusting himself inside. As there was no one there he entered and proceeded to make himself to home, first opening the trap-door which led to the cellar.

"Thar, we hev now secured a means of retreat in the rear should we be attacked in the front. Now, Billy Bombshell, what ye need most is a good squar' meal. Thar's a decided sense o' loneliness in ther inside o' me, which I don't approve of. I wonder what ther bill o' fare is ter-day?"

Billy Bombshell had just finished his repast when he heard steps just outside and the next moment Leonard entered the cabin.

"Ha! so you are here, are you? Where is the old Witch, Hannah?"

"Echo answers, where?" replied Bill. "I made that same inquiry myself a bit ago, but I didn't git no satisfactory answer. It's my 'pinion she's away, som'ers. Mabbe she are on joodicial business."

"What has become of the girl who was in the ruins?" continued Leonard.

"Most mysterious disappearance on record. Like enough, she's gone up in a balloon. Folks call my 'spectable grandmarm a witch; mebbe

she changed ther gal inter a bird, an' she's flewed away."

"You had better answer my question, you little imp of Satan, if you know anything concerning the girl."

"Now, don't go fur ter git mad. Ef my suggestions ain't valuable to ye don't ask fur 'em. How d'ye s'pose I know anything about any gal, anyway."

"How did you escape from the room where I placed you?"

"Ther court rules that question out. 'Nother thing, ther court 'lows that there sha'n't be any bulldozin'; yer called ther witness hard names jest now."

"You come with me, you young devil," said Leonard, as he made a lunge for the boy. "I'll fix your case."

"I hain't got time," said Bill, and he made a spring for the trap-door and disappeared. "I always like ter oblige anybody when it's a possible thing, but under ther present circumstances I hope ye'll s'cuse me. I've got a pressin' 'gement of ther utmost 'portance, else I'd sart'ly 'commodate ye."

Bill had stopped on the stairs and now popped his head above the floor, but he kept his keen eyes fixed on Leonard, watching his every movement so as to be prepared for anything he might do to injure him. The latter knew of the passage leading from the cellar, and also of the manifold passages leading from the main one near the ruins, and he realized the uselessness of pursuing Bill among them, and, besides, he feared he might lose his way.

"Do ye know of anybody that is waitin' fur ye anywhere?" continued the boy. "'Cause ef ye do, don't let me detain ye a minute, but gush with vigor on."

Leonard glared at him angrily, but the boy returned his gaze unconcernedly.

"I'll warm you for this, you little brat, if I ever get my hands on you. I would stay now and starve you out, were it not for my anxiety to find the old Witch, your grandmother, as soon as possible."

"Well, good-by, old sweet-lag roct. Call ag'in, sometime when ye can't stay so long. Give my respects ter Sam Tanner when ye see him. Oh! Ye've gone, hev'ye? Allow me ter bid ye a most respectful good-by ag'in. Ye might hev gone afore ef ye had said anything 'bout it."

Leonard had left the cabin, and the boy now returned to the kitchen and watched him through the open door. He then prepared to return to the cave to search for Philip. Before going down the cellar again, however, he went to the door to see where Leonard was. He was not in sight, but he saw Molly Garrett as related in the last chapter.

"Now," said Bill, as he came back into the cabin after his interview with Molly, "a relief committee o' one is hereby appointed ter go in s'arch o' ther lost explorer. Where's a match? My 'spectable grandmarm ain't so pertic'lar 'bout keepin' things where they belong as I wish she was."

He lighted his candle and put several matches in his pocket, saying, as he did so:

"Billy Bombshell ain't a fool; he learns wisdom by 'sperience. If we'd only had a match or so in our pocket last night when the candle was put out, things would have been different."

He now descended to the cellar once more and entered the passage. As he went along he observed that there were no side passages leading from it, and there was no danger of his losing his way. He had been through it once before, it will be remembered, but having no light he had not at that time an opportunity to notice the formation of it.

He was obliged to go slowly, for, like the others he had been in, the course of this crooked path and the sides and floor were irregular and uneven. When he reached the base of the ruins a surprise awaited him. He heard foot-steps, and looking in the direction from which the sound came, he saw some one coming from the passage which led to the sea. He bore a candle in his hand, the light of which showed the person to be Philip, who saw and recognized Billy about the same time he was himself discovered.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo!"

"Whar be ye bound for?" asked Billy.

"I was about to go in search of you," was the reply.

"Wal, I'll be blessed if that wa'n't jest what I was goin' ter do fur you. Whar ye been all summer, anyway? I reckoned ye'd got lost in ther fog an' couldn't diskiver yerself. I bumped 'round thar a spell tryin' ter find ye, but I wa'n't

over 'n above successful; an' then I went ter work tryin' ter find myself."

"Where did you finally get out of the cave?" asked Philip.

"Ther same way we came in. Then I went up ter ther abode of my 'spectable grandmarm an' foddered. I see'd old Scowler up thar an' passed ther time o' day with him. He seems to hev a mighty pile o' affection fur me; he wanted ter embrace me, but I respectfully declined that honor, an' fin'ly he lit out. Now, give us ther 'ticklers o' your escape."

Philip told how he had escaped from the cave, and where he had found himself when he came out into daylight. He also told him of the interview he had had with his grandmother. The boy was visibly affected by the intelligence of her condition, but he said nothing. When Philip told him what she had done with Sadie the boy brightened up and said:

"Ther old lady's plan didn't work jes't cordin' ter ther programme in that case. I knew ther leetle gal was gone, 'cause when I kim by here I opened ther door an' found she wa'n't here. I wonder ef I can't open ther old thing ag'in?"

He stepped up and began fumbling around the door as he had before, and after awhile succeeded in touching the spring.

"Thar," he said, as the iron plate rose slowly upward, "ye see how ther thing works. I opened it ther same way this arternoon, though 'twas all accident, an' I found ther gal wa'n't ter home. I didn't know what had become of her till I see Molly Garrett. She told me all about it. She found her down on ther beach, with the tide comin' in an' all ready ter drown'd her. An' she was tied up so's she couldn't git away. Molly got her out of that quicker'n seat, an' is goin' ter take ther leetle gal home with her ter Setback. She knew about you bein' throwed inter ther sea, an' she was mighty tickled when she found you wasn't drown'd."

"Well, what shall we do now?"

"It's gittin' 'long toward night ag'in. Molly told me ef I see a feller by ther name of Felton ter tell him whar ther leetle gal is. She said as how he was 'round here some'ts, but she'd left ther leetle gal alone, an' didn't want ter stop ter hunt him up. Hev ye had anything ter eat? 'Cause ef ye hain't, we might as well go up by ther way o' my grandmarm's palace an' refresh ther inner man. Ef ye kin eat as much ez I did, ther old lady 'll think there's been a whole menagery in ther cupbu'd when she sees it."

"I must confess that my appetite is in pretty good condition," replied Philip, as they started along the passage.

When they arrived at the cabin Billy found everything as he had left it.

"This here cupbu'd don't flow with milk an' honey," said Billy, as he placed the remnants of his own meal on the table, "but I reckon we kin scrape together enough ter keep ye from starvin'."

Billy sat and watched his friend eat with as much delight as he had experienced while he was eating himself.

After Philip had finished his repast, and while he was putting away such portions as still remained, they heard from the direction of the ruins, a wild, piercing scream. So weird and blood-curdling was it, so awful in the intensity of the anguish which it expressed, that it seemed impossible that any human voice could have uttered it. The boys shrunk back appalled, and covered their ears to shut out the terrible sound.

CHAPTER XII.

FOUL MURDER.

WHEN Leonard left the cabin he only retired a short distance, and sat down beside a rock to await old Hannah's return. From his position he could see when any one approached or left the place. He had seen Molly Garrett when she appeared, and the interview between her and Billy, but his only wish now was to see the old Witch, and learn where Sadie was. Had he known of the little charge whom Molly had left up at the "hole in the cliff," he would have been more interested.

But he did not know, and Molly returned and took little Sadie home to Setback, while Billy, as we have seen, went in search of Philip.

"It is strange," thought Leonard, "where the old hag can be, and more strange what she can have done with the girl. If she dares play me false, I will tear her limb from limb," and his face grew dark as night at the mere thought of his long-cherished plans coming to naught through any neglect or betrayal through her.

"But she dare not, and, besides, she covets the gold which I drop into her skinny palm. She will do as I bid her as long as I fee her well with shining gold."

"But where is she now, and where is the girl? Both gone, and even that brat of a boy, if he tells the truth, does not know where they are."

Leonard sat by the rock for a long time, but at last his patience was rewarded, and he saw old Hannah approaching. Rising, he advanced to meet her, and as he came near her he noticed that her manner was wild and strange, but he did not hesitate as he strode forward.

"So you have come at last?" he said. "Where have you been all the afternoon, and what have you done with the girl?"

"The night cometh on, when no man can work, and the harvest is ready for reaping. And yet she had a sweet face."

"Answer me, you old beldam, what have you done with the girl, Sadie?"

"What, my lord, art come so soon? And yet not soon enough to see the pretty offering, which to old Neptune I have made. She wept piteously; but the waves came up and kissed the tears off her face. Whence camest those dark, fearful clouds? This morning all was bright and fair, and Nature smiled. Hark! I tell thee Death is abroad this night! Canst thou not hear the sweep of his wings, as he whirls in his dizzy flight through space? But she had a sweet face."

Leonard's face had grown haggard with a terrible fear, gathered in part from the madwoman babbling that the child had come to harm. What was the meaning of those words "the pretty offering which I have made to old Neptune?" Perhaps it was only the senseless raving of a maniac, and yet the child was gone. Where? The dread foreboding forced itself upon him that the old Witch had taken the child in a mad freak and thrown her into the sea. If so, the returning tide had ere now carried her far beyond his reach, and all his plans must fail. The thought was maddening, and he sprung upon the woman and grasped her by the throat.

"For the last time, will you tell me?" he hissed. "Where is the child I placed in your care? She is not in the room at the ruins; neither is she at your cabin. Where is she?"

Old Hannah was possessed of wonderful strength for one so old as she seemed to be, and she wrenched herself free from his grasp and then turned on him like a tiger at bay.

"Ha! lay not a violent hand on old Hannah, the Witch of the Cliff!" she said, "or else her curse will follow you. Seek ye the child. Do I not tell you that to-day I made a glorious sacrifice to old Neptune? And ere now he has borne her far hence to his cavern-home beneath the rolling sea. Go seek her there if you will, but hell and its furies seize thee if thou com'st nigh me."

Suddenly her manner changed, and, without appearing to notice Leonard, she seemed to be addressing a third person, or a creature of her own imagination.

"I knew thee, Philip! Ay! I knew thee! Often have I dandled thee on my knees in thy baby-days. Thou art finely grown, but I knew thee. And yet the child had a sweet face. Her yellow tresses made me think of gold."

Leonard had now no doubt that the madwoman had drowned the child, even as she said, and his rage was terrible.

"Gold, you old hag? I have paid you too much gold to have you betray me like this!"

"And yet she was a sweet child," muttered the woman, without heeding her companion.

"But you shall pay for the deed with your own blood, you viper!" and drawing a long keen knife, he sprung upon her and buried it to the haft in her bosom.

She turned toward him, and for a moment the clouds that enveloped her reason were rent asunder. Her eyes flashed upon his face, and then from her lips came that terrible cry of anguish which had pierced the ears of the boys at the cabin—a cry of such wild, awful agony as could not have been caused by mere physical pain.

Leonard flung her to the ground, but she partially raised herself on one hand and looked at him with a wild earnest gaze.

"Barton Leonard! oh! wicked, unnatural man! What hast thou done? What hast thou done? Canst name the crime thou hast committed? May Heaven spare you the misery of knowing whose blood you have shed this night!"

Again her eyes put on that wild, unnatural glare, as she continued:

"'Tis old Hannah, the Witch of the Cliff. Ha! ha! the time is ripe! so let it come! And yet she had a sweet face!"

Barton Leonard turned and fled, with that

fearful cry ringing in his ears. Ay! and so it will, you coward, as long as memory lasts. Months and years may roll away, but your guilty soul shall have no peace. By day will that shriek of anguish ring in your ears, and when you lie upon your couch at night, it shall awaken you, and you will see before you that face as it was upturned to you in the twilight.

Old Hannah's scream was heard by other ears than the boys' at the cabin. Felton had just come from the ruins where he had spent the last two hours in giving the premises a thorough examination. He had no doubt but Sadie was behind one of those strong iron doors, but their locks had resisted his utmost efforts, and at last he was forced to turn away.

Just as he left the place, that fearful shriek rent the air. For a moment it chilled his blood, and then he advanced hurriedly in that direction. He came upon the scene in time to catch a glimpse of Leonard as he walked rapidly away toward Setback. He recognized the retreating villain, however, and as his gaze rested upon the prostrate woman, who lay helpless where she had been stricken, a hard, bitter express on came into his eyes.

"More crime that Barton Leonard must one day answer for!" he muttered. "Who is his victim now?"

The woman started up again as he approached. "Back! back! curses on ye! What would ye with the old Witch?"

"I would help you," he said, soothingly. "Hark! hear ye the bell tolling the dread tidings? But no one knows where the gold is hid! I will bide my time! yea, wait and weep!"

Felton saw that she was growing weak and he feared he should not learn anything of Sadie. Indeed, in the condition of her mind, he doubted if any information she would give him could be relied on, but he resolved to question her.

"Do you know anything of the little girl, Sadie?" he asked.

"Sadie? She had a sweet face. Go ask the waves! go seek her in yon treacherous sea! I know ye not—and yet—it seems that once I knew that face."

Again her reason had reasserted itself, and she was gazing upon him with an earnest look.

"Lawrence Felton, I know you now, though it is years since I have seen you. Why are you here?"

"I seek my sister's child. Do you know where she is? Little Sadie?"

An expression of horror crept over her face as she listened to the question.

"Ay! I remember. I led her to yonder beach—go back to the mother—the child is dead. I threw her in the sea. It seems like a dream. There was the boy, Philip, fifteen years ago, and where is he? What a fearful tale for a mother's ears—the story you must tell when you go back! But her anguish cannot equal what I have suffered to-night. My time has come; my hours are few. I must make what reparation is possible to that poor mother. Heaven grant she may forgive the poor creature who has wronged her so bitterly. Listen; come nearer!"

The woman's voice was faint and weak, and Felton bent lower over her. As he listened to the strange story she told him he was thrilled by the earnestness of her manner, and by her sorrow for the part she had taken. When she concluded, and he realized all, his blood grew cold with horror at the awful crime Barton Leonard had committed.

Her eyes had closed and Felton thought she was unconscious, but in a moment she broke out again in a frenzy.

"Ha! she was a pretty child! Who says I threw her in the sea? The stars did not see it, and the sun has gone. See those demons therein the shadow! There, they are gone. They cannot tear my secret from me. Hear the wind moan—and moan—and moan. It was not he! It was not Barton that stabbed me to the heart! And yet she had a sweet face! No, no—"

There was a gurgling sound and she fell back; Hannah, the Witch of the Cliff was dead.

For a moment Felton remained lost in thought, from which he was aroused by approaching footsteps. Looking up he saw Billy Bombshell and Philip coming toward him.

"What's ther circus?" asked Billy. "What's ther meaning o' that screech?"

"Barton Leonard has murdered this woman," said Felton.

Then the boys saw the prostrate form.

"It are my 'spectable grandmarm," said Billy. "What'd Scowler got ag'in' her. He's tried it on Petrel Phil two or three times, an' he'd 'a' laid me cold this arfternoon if he could 'a' got his flippers on me, but he wa'n't soon enough. Did ye hear ther row?"

"I only arrived in time to catch a glimpse of Leonard as he fled. But from what she said after I came upon the scene, I learned the cause of the deed. It seems she has been insane, for how long I do not know, but to-day in her mad fury, she sacrificed the girl, Sadie, who had been left in her care by Leonard, as an offering to Neptune. In his anger at the loss of the child, he has shed the blood of this woman."

"But ther gal are all safe enough," said Billy. "I see'd Molly Garrett a bit ago, an' she said as how she found ther gal down on ther beach, tied up within reach o' ther tide."

"Where is she now?" asked Felton.

"Molly told me ter tell ye that ye'd find her at ther cabin, at Setback."

"Then I must go there at once. Leonard may get her in his power again."

He turned to Philip and conversed with him earnestly for a few minutes. As they talked an expression of pleasure gradually lighted up the young man's features, and he clasped Felton's proffered hand warmly.

Billy Bombshell sat gazing silently at all that remained mortal of old Hannah. She had called herself his grandmother, and, although he had sometimes doubted if there was such a relationship between them, she had been kind to him in a certain way. None could say what his thoughts were, but it was plain to be seen that he was deeply affected by her sudden and violent death.

When Felton and Philip turned toward him he spoke.

"She had her pecoolierartieis, an' I reckon that most ov us can't brag over her much on that pint, but in ther main she has used me squar". In consekence o' a certain combatibility of temper I deemed it proodent fur me ter lodge outside, but my board was always served promptly whenever I made an application. She took car' ov me when I war too little ter take car' o' myself, an' though sometimes we both ov us used unparliamentary language, I don't lay up nothin' on that account, an' I hope she won't. She tried ter drown'd ther leetle gal, it's true, but she didn't do it, for Molly Garrett got ther gal away, an' 'sides, 'cordin' ter ther evidence, she was laborin' under a mental aberlation, an' therefore warn't 'sponsible. She has always said she was my grandmother, but I ain't prepared ter swar that I am her grandson, though all the same I consider it my juty ter see that she is decently buried, an' that—"

He stopped and looked away in the direction of Setback.

Felton spoke to him:

"She was not your grandmother, my boy; of that I am well assured, from what she told me; though she said nothing that would show who your parents were. I presume she would have done so, if she knew, had not her delirium again come on. She spoke of having gold concealed about her cabin which would now belong to you."

There was a peculiar glitter in Bill's eyes as he replied:

"If she has left any shekles they shall be applied to a good purpose."

"We must now be on the way to Setback as soon as possible," said Felton, "but, first, we have a duty to perform here."

The necessary implements were procured from the cabin, and in a short time all that remained mortal of old Hannah, the Witch of the Cliff, with all her faults and short-comings and some virtues, was covered from the uncharitable eyes of the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FALL OVER THE CLIFF.

"Rest ther old cat in peace!" said Billy as they finished their task.

He said it reverently.

"Now let us prepare to go to Setback," said Philip. "I am anxious to be on my way."

He and Bill returned to the cabin with the tools they had been using, while Felton remained near the grave they had made, absorbed in thought.

After the lapse of several minutes he was suddenly aroused by the sound of a shot, followed by shouts of anger from Billy Bombshell. He hastened in the direction from which the sounds came and soon arrived upon the scene, but too late to be of any assistance to his friends. All was over when he reached them.

They had returned to the cabin with the tools when they heard a moan, as of some one in distress, a short distance further on. Not thinking of any harm they hurried in that direction, and soon came upon a man lying prostrate upon the ground.

His back was toward them, so they did not recognize him, but as soon as they came near

he turned, and, partially raising himself, drew a pistol and fired at Philip. The shot took effect and the young man fell to the ground.

The man now sprung to his feet and made a grab for Billy Bombshell, but the lad was too nimble for him. By this time he had recognized the man as his old enemy, Ben Garrett, who had tried to kill Philip and himself at the hole in the cliff a few nights before.

"Say, old Methus'ler, you'll have ter limber up them j'int's o' yourn afore ye kin ketch Billy Bombshell. How old was ye yer last birthday? Better withdraw from ther arena, an' give ther rising generation a chance."

Garrett believed he could capture the boy, and he had no intention of withdrawing until he had done so. But the sequel proved that it would have been better for him by far had he taken Billy's advice.

The latter was dodging the big ruffian at every turn, and seemed to experience no trouble in doing so.

"Look here, my antedeluvian friend," said Billy, "you're gittin' yerself all out o' breath fur nothin'. Ye couldn't ketch me in a month o' Sundays, no more 'n ye could ketch yer own shadder. I've got about sick o' bein' chased 'round hyer in this way, an' I give ye fair warnin' ye may come ter some harm if ye don't let up. I've got a temper as well as other folks, though I ain't so 'tarnal cranky as some I know; an' thar's a limit ter my patience. Now you jest listen ter what ther law-giver is tellin' ye, an' ye may be saved. But if ye persist in ther inikertous course ye're now pursooing, ye'll come ter grief."

"Now I've got ye," said Ben, as he made a grab at the boy.

"Got ther bellyache jest as much," said Billy, as he dipped under his arm. "Now, I tell ye ter git out; my patience are about exhausted. Do ye want me ter git up an' drum on ye? Ye'd think ther mountains was a-tumblin' onter ye."

At this moment Ben made another rush at the boy. Billy was close to the edge of the cliff and he had played the dodging game till his opponent pretty well understood his tactics. The lad waited until Ben was almost upon him and then, quick as a flash, he dropped flat upon the ground.

The result was rather more dramatic than even Billy had anticipated. In Garrett's headlong rush his foot tripped against the boy's body, and he pitched, with a wild cry over the cliff.

At this point it was a sheer descent of nearly sixty feet to the beach, and near the base of the cliff was a mass of sharp, jagged rocks, upon which a moment later Garrett's body fell with a crash.

Billy crept to the edge and looked over with a white, scared face. He had not expected such a result when he dropped himself in the path of his infuriated pursuer. But if he had been caught, it was altogether likely that he would have been served the same way himself. It was too dark now for him to see to the bottom of the cliff, so he crept back to the side of his friend to learn the extent of his injuries.

Felton appeared at this moment, and at once began to look for the wound, which proved to be only a slight one, and when it had been dressed Philip expressed himself as being ready to continue their way to the town.

"How did it all happen?" asked Felton.

Philip told him how they had been decoyed to the spot by hearing moans, and as soon as they were near him the man turned and shot at them.

"This is the same man who made the attack upon you a few nights since, is he not?" asked Felton.

"Yes. He's ther same pilgrim," replied Billy. "But he'll never make another. I kep' a-tellin' him ter let up or he'd find hisself up ther wrong tree, but he didn't mind. Now, ye see, in consekence, he's fallen from his high estate onter ther rocks below."

"You say Leonard saw you when he was here this arfternoon?"

"Yes; I had a few minutes' friendly conversation with him. He swore he'd have my blood, but I'm willing ter bet ears with him, two ter one, that he never will."

"I think I see ther cause of this attack. Leonard knew Billy was in the vicinity somewhere, and might have seen him strike the cowardly blow which killed his grandmother. On his way to Setback he met this man Garrett, and sent him back to slay the boy. He probably saw you as you returned to the cabin with the spade, and lying down here, uttered those moans to draw you toward him."

"He'd better have let ther job out, an' any one else that's got any ijee of tacklin' this tadpole; but I didn't s'pose he was goin' over the cliff ther way he did."

"Can you lead us to the beach below by some course less dangerous than that pursued by Ben Garrett?"

"Wal, thar's a path back here a bit whar we kin git down quite comfortably. What ye want ter go down thar fur?"

"We must ascertain if his fall was fatal, and if not, although he was our enemy we must not leave him there to suffer."

"Fatal? Mortal Jeeswax! Jest you look over ther a minute an' see if you think it would be fatal!"

Felton stepped toward the edge of the cliff, and as he did so he felt a portion of the rock give way under his feet. He had barely time to spring back when a rock which must have weighed several tons slid away and went crashing down upon the rocks below.

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Billy. "That was a clus shave fur you. Ef that stun struck Ben Garrett, do you think 'twould be fatal?"

Billy now led the way to the path he had spoken of, and they all descended to the beach. They soon stood near the spot where the unfortunate man had fallen over, and on examination found that the rock which had become detached from the cliff had indeed fallen upon the body, completely covering it from sight.

"Tain't goin' ter cost much ter bury him," said Billy, as he glanced toward the top of the cliff. "I hope there won't any more pieces fall while I am here."

"There is nothing for us to do here," said Felton, "and the sooner we are on the way to Setback the better I shall be pleased. We have already lost considerable valuable time, and I shall not rest easy till I have little Sadie under my own protection."

"Wal, hyer we goes then. Foller me, an' I'll lead ye to ther goal o' yer ambition by ther shortest route."

He started off at a rapid pace, closely followed by Felton and Philip, and it was not long before they saw the lights of the town just ahead of them.

"Does ye want ter proceed direct ter ther Garrett cabin, or have ye business som'ers else that ye want ter attend ter fust?"

"We will go to the cabin at once. Perhaps it will be well to proceed with caution, for our enemies may be here before us."

"Thar's ther cabin," said Bill, a moment later, "an' I guess ye're right 'bout thar bein' somebody ahead on us, for thar's some hosses hitched out thar, ye see. It's lucky we hurried, or we'd 'a' been too late."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DENOUEMENT.

WHEN Molly took leave of Billy Bombshell she went directly to the place where she had left Sadie. The little girl had remained quietly inside, as she had been told, for she was afraid she would be seen by the old Witch and be taken back to the beach again, or at least to her prison-room, and when Molly made her appearance she was welcomed with many caresses.

The two started at once for Setback, for Molly wished to get away from the vicinity of the ruins as soon as possible. She was afraid of being seen by old Hannah, or worse still, by Leonard, who, Billy had said, was lurking near the place.

The little girl could not walk very fast, and it was some time before they reached the town. They had seen no one on the way, but as they approached her home Molly saw Tom Parsons and Sam Tanner sink away from the cabin where she had found Felton the evening before. They also saw her and Sadie, but they made no move to molest her, and she entered her own cabin and fastened the door.

She prepared some food for the child, and then telling her she should be gone but a short time, she again left the cabin and went down the street to the hotel. She wished to see Felton, and she did not know but he might still be there, though he had said he should visit the ruins during the afternoon.

She learned, however, that he had left the house some time previous and had not yet returned. She left a message for him, when he should return, that she wished to see him at her father's cabin. The proprietor, who knew Molly, promised to deliver the message as soon as Felton came in, and she then took her leave and returned at once to Sadie.

The two men whom Molly had seen knew that the little girl who was with her was the one that

Leonard had gone to the ruins after that afternoon, but they thought he might have changed his mind about starting from that point, as he had said the previous night, and sent the girl to Setback by Molly.

They had remembered their victim whom they had left lying by the lone cabin the day before, and had now come to see if the body had been discovered and removed. They searched in and about the cabin, but of course found nothing, and they concluded that the body had been taken away. They did not for a moment imagine but that their work had been so well done as to deprive their victim of life. Satisfied on this point, they went down the street and entered one of their numerous resorts to await Leonard's return.

It was some time after dark before he made his appearance, and when he did he looked haggard and worn. He entered the saloon and, taking a seat at the table where they were, called for brandy. He seized the glass that was placed before him and drank the contents at a gulp. He then turned to the men beside him.

"Ther game is up," he said.

"What's ther rifle?" inquired Sam.

"The girl is dead!"

"Since when?" asked Tom Parsons. "We see'd her not three hours ago, an' she wa'n't dead then."

"Where did you see her?"

"She war with Ben Garrett's gal, goin' ter ther cabin."

"It must have been some other girl. This girl, Sadie, is dead. The old woman turned crazy to-day, and threw her into the sea."

"How d'ye know she did?"

"The old hag told me so herself, and gloated over it. She bade me seek her in the caverns at the bottom of the sea where she had been borne by old Neptune. She'll never do anything of the kind again," and he shuddered as though her terrible scream still rung in his ears.

"Wal, this Garrett gal may have fished her out of the water. Tennyrate, I've seen the gal afore an' I know her, an' I know I see'd ther same one late this afternoon, goin' ter Garrett's cabin with his gal."

"Thar's nary a doubt but what 'twas ther same gal as you've had caged up at ther ruins," added Tom.

"It may be possible that the Garrett girl found and rescued her. If so I am all right yet; we will go there and see. But wait! we may as well go prepared, for if it is she, we will start at once. Are the horses in readiness?"

"Yas; we had them all right this afternoon, and should have taken 'em ter ther ruins 'cordin' ter orders, but we see ther gal, an' s'posed ye hed changed yer mind 'bout startin' from that pint."

"Well, I will go to the hotel and get some supper, and you might as well do the same, there or at some other place, for you will need it before we get to Mendocino."

He left the saloon and was soon followed by his two tools. In the course of an hour they had finished their supper and got the horses in readiness, and all three took their way to the Garrett cabin.

"Ben is not at home," said Leonard, "for I meth him not far from the village, and sent him back to try his hand again on that boy, Billy Bombshell."

"I wish I could try my hand on him," said Sam Tanner.

They were soon close to the cabin, and they fastened their horses, while Leonard went at once to the door which he tried to open. It was fastened.

"Who is there?" asked Molly.

"Barton Leonard. I have come for Sadie Alderson, whom you brought here this afternoon."

"Then you may go away again," was the reply, "for I shall not let you in."

"Is not Sadie here?"

"It makes no difference whether she is or not; you cannot have her if she is."

"Yes, I can, and will. Open the door at once or I will break it down!"

"I shall not open the door, and I will shoot the first man who enters!"

Molly was a brave girl when she was aroused, and as she held a pistol in her hand it was evident she intended to make good her threat. The other two men now came up, and Leonard ordered them to break down the door. They put their shoulders against it and it yielded at once, but Molly was as good as her word, for, a moment later, Sam Tanner dropped to the floor with a bullet in his breast.

But Molly was helpless now, and the two re-

maining villains had everything their own way. She made an attempt to retreat to the room in the rear, but before she could close the door they followed her, and prevented it.

At this moment Felton made his appearance in the open doorway, closely followed by the two boys. When Tom Parsons's eyes rested upon Philip, and he recognized him as the young man whom he and Sam Tanner had thrown into the sea, he was stricken with terror. His superstitious mind grasped only one idea: the dead had arisen and come to haunt him. With a wild cry of horror he turned and sprang through the low window and fled.

Leonard was made of different material. He knew that Philip Alderson stood before him alive. How he had escaped his doom he knew not, but that he had escaped was apparent.

But, although his mind was not troubled by any superstitious misgivings, he saw plainly that his game was up for the present, at least, and he would gladly have followed his companion through the window had he not been covered by Felton's revolver.

"Stop where you are, Barton Leonard," said Felton. "Your plans have failed. Philip Alderson, yonder stands the man who caused your abduction fifteen years ago. Before her marriage with your father he was a suitor for the hand of Alice Felton, your mother. She refused him, kindly but firmly, and afterward became the wife of Allan Alderson. Barton Leonard laid a plan for revenge. He became associated with your father in business. Five years later, when you were four years old, your nurse very suddenly disappeared, taking you with her, and all efforts to obtain any traces of yourself, or the nurse, were of no avail."

"There was no suspicion that Barton Leonard was in any way concerned in the abduction, though it has since transpired that he was the instigator and prime mover in the affair. Later, a daughter came to gladden the bereft hearts of your parents; Sadie, the little captive of the ruins."

"In all these years he has seemed a devoted friend of the family, while in his secret heart he was nursing his revenge. Two years ago Allan Alderson died. He left a will in which the bulk of his property was bequeathed to his son Philip, should he ever be found and his identity be established. In the course of time Leonard again became a suitor for the hand of Allan Alderson's widow. At about this time Sadie also mysteriously disappeared. Leonard offered large rewards for the recovery of the girl, but all to no purpose; she could not be found."

"At last, overcome by his seeming kindness and his importunities, your mother consented to become his wife, on condition of his finding and returning to her, her lost daughter, Sadie."

"I will accomplish it," he said, "if I search the world over," and he departed. I suspected, and followed him to this place where he had her concealed in the care of old Hannah. He had been instrumental in her abduction, as he had been in yours."

"You already know how he had attempted your life several times within the last few days. And you also know how he murdered old Hannah in his anger because she had in her insanity thrown Sadie into the sea. Reason resumed its sway before she died, and she recognized me as I bent over her, though I should not have recognized her."

"She was the nurse who disappeared fifteen years ago with the boy Philip. This wretch, Sam Tanner, is the man, who, in the service of Leonard, stole Sadie and brought her here to place her in the care of the old Witch, who came here shortly after leaving your parents with you."

"You will not wonder at the dreadful cry she uttered, as she turned and saw who her assassin was, when I tell you that her murderer was her own son. She was Barton Leonard's mother, and the cry which broke from her lips was more of mental anguish than physical suffering."

During this recital Felton had allowed the revolver which he held to drop lower and lower until the hand in which it was clasped now hung by his side. Leonard noticed this and saw a chance for escape which he was not slow to improve.

With one bound he sprang through the open window by which Tom Parsons had made his exit, and disappeared in the darkness, shouting back ere he fled:

"Good-by, Lawrence Felton, for the present. You will hear from me again. You have foiled the plans I have cherished for a lifetime, but I will have my revenge, even if I have to follow you to the ends of the earth."

Felton ran to the window, but he had disappeared.

Molly now brought the girl from the room in the rear. The child at once ran to her uncle, who clasped her in his arms.

"This is your sister," he said to Philip, as he led her to him.

Sadie looked up in her brother's face searchingly. She was apparently satisfied with the scrutiny, for she allowed herself to be taken in his arms, and returned his caresses with sisterly affection.

Felton now prepared to return to the hotel with Philip and Sadie, and he asked Molly to accompany them to care for the little girl, and when he had told her the fate of her uncle, Ben Garrett, she had no hesitation in doing so.

He wished also to take Billy there, but the boy refused.

"I kin take care of No. 1," he said, "an' I'll find quarters som'er's else. I'll drop in on ye in ther mornin', ter see how things move, but fur ther present I've got other fish to fry."

The following morning Felton started for Mendocino, on his way to the East. Philip and Sadie were of course with him; also Molly Garrett, who was easily persuaded to go with them to care for the child on the journey.

Felton and Philip did their best to induce Billy to accompany them, but the boy would not go.

"I should like ter go," he said, "an' see Petrel Phil safe ter his home, but I reckon ye've got a full team now, an' I've got business hyer that has got ter be tended to. I've swered a swear that I'll avenge ther death o' my 'spectable grandmarn, an' ef I hold together I'm goin' ter do et. She might not 'a' been my grandmarn, an' prob'ly won't, but that don't alter ther case. I calkerlate I'm consider'bly beholden ter her, fur feed an' etseters, an' I'm goin' ter lay fur that Leonard fur what he done ter her. Where he goes, thar I shell go. He ain't nowhar ter be seen this mornin', but I shall find him. If he has left Setback, I shall likewise emigrate. He won't prob'ly go East very soon, but thar's one place he will go to sooner or later, unless he reforms consider'ble afore I git ther drop on him. It'll be a sad day for him when this torpedo explodes. P'raps you'll hear ov me ag'in, an' p'raps ye won't, but whether ye do or not, ye kin make up yer minds I'm a-harkin' arter old Scowler fur all I'm worth. It's now time fur yer gush with vigor on. Ther court's adjourned!"

Finding it impossible to persuade Billy Bombshell to return with them, the party proceeded on their way, and in due time arrived at their Eastern home, where they were warmly welcomed by the mother who had looked for years in vain for her son to return.

Billy Bombshell is remembered with kindly feelings by all, and especially so by Philip, whose life he had twice saved on that wild, Western coast.

THE END.

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